

The Soul of the Empire: Style and Meaning in the Mosaic Pavement of the Byzantine Imperial Palace in Constantinople

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike modern Rome, modern Istanbul reveals little of its ancient and medieval past. As Constantinople, the “New Rome,” it was the capital first of the Eastern Roman Empire and then of the Byzantine Empire, preserving Roman culture and the Roman imperial idea in a changed yet unbroken tradition until its conquest by the Turks in 1453. Yet despite its long history, little of Byzantine Constantinople is visible in Istanbul today. The city walls, which go back to the fifth century, are well preserved in places, Hagia Sophia and several other churches survive, and other monuments and ruins are of course visible, but not enough to evoke a thriving city or a living culture.

What is missing, above all, is a sense of the splendors and pleasures of *secular* Byzantium. This is not surprising. Throughout the lands that once constituted the Byzantine Empire, the great surviving monuments of architecture, and their figural decoration in mosaic or painting, are almost exclusively religious. Nowhere is this truer, and more significant, than in Constantinople itself. The church of Hagia Sophia is not only a triumph

of visionary design, but a storehouse of the best of many centuries of Byzantine religious art. To the lay visitor it must inevitably come to symbolize Byzantine culture, and its influence on the specialist, if not as direct, may be every bit as strong. More than any other single monument, Hagia Sophia transmits to us the true glory of the empire—but transmits it through a filter of religious devotion. The grandiose intellectuality of the building’s conception captures a unique set of human and historic circumstances, but the message of the church itself, as it has come down to us and as a symbol of Byzantine culture, is otherworldly. This does not mean that it is ascetic, that it denies the possibility of pleasure; far from it, though the pleasures it evokes—of proportion, fine stonework, mosaic, and the gorgeous solemnities of the liturgy itself—are more demanding than many to which we are accustomed today. But Christian devotional art is intended by definition to lead the beholder away from the physical world and toward the contemplation and glorification of God. How well it accomplishes this intention is another matter. In any given work, aesthetic ideals or precious materials

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may outweigh religious feeling, and the interpenetration of imperial and religious ideologies may compromise singleminded spirituality. However strong a force Christianity was in Byzantine culture—and it was immensely strong—the thematic and emotional range of Byzantine religious art must not be equated with that of Byzantine art and culture as a whole.

Yet it is hard to avoid doing just that. Of Byzantine secular art, art intended to delight or instruct without central reference to Christian doctrine, few works survive that are comparable in quality to the great religious works, and by a circular process those which do are widely perceived as ancillary to an essentially “spiritual” culture. It is symbolic of this situation that although the Byzantine Imperial Palace stood adjacent not only to Hagia Sophia but to the Hippodrome, the scene of chariot races and triumphal pageants, only the Great Church still stands. The site of the Hippodrome is recognizable by the remains of its central *spina*, but as living monuments both Palace and Hippodrome have effectively vanished.¹

These reflections on the preservation and perception of Byzantine culture will help explain the importance of a unique archaeological find. Between 1935 and 1954 a team of excavators from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, working on the site of the Byzantine Imperial Palace, brought to light an extensive figural mosaic pavement. It occupies three (in all likelihood originally four) sides of a peristyle with an exterior measurement of 55.5 × 66.5 meters and a width varying between 7.2 and 10 meters. Assuming that the mosaic occupied all four sides of the courtyard, we may estimate its total area to have been approximately 1,900 square meters. Although less than a quarter of the mosaic is actually preserved, large portions of the mosaic survive virtually intact. Thus, despite its condition, the general character of the work is not in doubt. The mosaic depicts seemingly unrelated scenes of human and animal

life, scattered as vignettes against a white ground (Figs. 1–3). The figure style is highly naturalistic, but the various groups often differ radically in scale and do not share a unified or illusionistic space. Human and animal figures are juxtaposed without apparent logic, and explicitly violent scenes are found side by side with images of idyllic life and children’s games.

Needless to say, such a brief description scarcely hints at the significance of the Palace mosaic. It is the most important extant work of Byzantine secular art, and one of the most impressive works of any kind to survive from the Early Byzantine period. In scale, technical brilliance, range of subject matter, and richness of expression, it marks a peak of Byzantine artistic achievement. It is one of the most lavish of the many floor mosaics created in antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the fullest post-classical expression of Greco-Roman naturalism, and the only Early Byzantine secular work for which imperial patronage is unquestionable.

Scholars have recognized these qualities since the mosaic’s discovery, but the mosaic itself has yet to be fully integrated into the history of Byzantine art. Instead of being accepted as a central monument, a touchstone of Byzantine taste, it is treated as an anomaly. The reason for this is easily stated: no one knows for certain when the Palace mosaic was made. Published opinions range from the early fifth century to as late as ca. 700. In the face of such uncertainty it is not surprising that scholars are reluctant to acknowledge the work’s centrality: to what, after all, is it central? The inconclusiveness of the archaeological data from the excavation is one reason for the uncertainty, but this begs the question. Can a work of such eminence be so lacking in stylistic distinctiveness that it cannot be understood in the absence of archaeological facts? In this context, the mosaic’s uniqueness contributes to its difficulty. There is almost nothing of similar quality to which it can be compared, and the greater the difference of quality in an art-historical comparison, the greater the possibility of error.

More important is the difficulty of the period itself. The fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries were a time of change as radical as any in the pre-Industrial world. In political and social terms, a few key events and processes indicate the extent of change: the decisive triumph of Christianity in the Roman world, the fall of the Western Empire, the birth of the theme system as the basis of social and military organization, and the emergence of Islam

¹Perhaps no work of modern scholarship conveys the range and importance of Late Roman and Early Byzantine secular art more clearly than K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (Princeton-New York, 1979). The emphasis, however, is largely implicit; see my review of Weitzmann’s volume in *Art History* 4 (1981), 344–47. Even the most complete compendium of extant works would perforce omit whole categories of secular art of which no representatives survive. See, for example, the references to painted portraits of famous courtesans cited in C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), 119.

as a powerful hostile force. It is in recognition of these changes that we speak of the beginning of this period as Late Roman, Late Antique, or Early Christian, and of its end as Byzantine and medieval.²

In art, the evolution from Late Antique to Byzantine is harder to define than in history on the widest scale. Not surprisingly, on one level this is because of the tremendous range of styles which flourished during the period. On a deeper level it is because of the uncertainty which exists among scholars regarding the nature of the transition itself. The problem lies not so much in ordering and interpreting such a variety of material, as in knowing what sort of questions to ask of the material in the first place. Some patterns, of course, emerge so clearly as to be taken for granted. Christian imagery becomes increasingly rich, complex, and established, and the devotional image, or icon, emerges as an artistic and spiritual focus. But these basic patterns are potentially dangerous, for two reasons. First, they offer only a partial view of artistic development. They have to do with the way images were used, not with the essential nature of the images themselves. Since the nature of an image cannot be understood without reference to its style, it remains to be asked what *stylistic* developments correspond to those of content and function which mark the transition to Byzantine art. But—and here is the second danger—to answer this question, or even to ask it, is to engage what is perhaps the most widespread misconception about Byzantine art, that of the centrality of the icon.

Etymologically, the word *icon* simply means an image, though its use is largely restricted to devotional images. In a Byzantine context the word has more specific connotations of abstract intensity, transcendence, and a combination of remoteness and immediacy: the visual expression of the carefully formulated doctrine of a mystical connection between the image and its sacred subject.³ If Byzantine art is perceived as otherworldly, the idea of the icon, and by extension, of an *iconic* art, lies close to the heart of the perception. Thus in asking “How did Byzantine art develop?” it is hard to

avoid a teleological bias—“How did Byzantine art develop the icon?” The question is a valid and important one, equivalent to asking how an art came into being that could express the full intensity of Christian devotion.⁴

A plausible answer lies ready to hand, in the form of the abstract tendencies which, as early as the third century, begin to assert themselves within, and against, the naturalistic conventions of Greco-Roman art. These tendencies play an important role in the evolution of Late Antique and Byzantine styles, and because they are anti-classical and anti-naturalistic it is hard not to identify them with spirituality. Understandably, then, the model most frequently imposed on the transitional period is that of a steady eclipse of “worldly” classicism by “spiritual” abstraction. This teleological approach has an extremely important implication for the practice of art history. It leads directly to the assumption, stated or implicit, that in the absence of other criteria for dating, the closer a work is to the spirit of Greco-Roman art, the earlier it must be, and conversely, that departure from Greco-Roman convention indicates a later date.⁵

Such an assumption underlies the earliest discussions of the Palace mosaic and has hindered the kind of detached observation and comparison that might have led to a more precise dating. More recent attempts reflect a fundamental change in the study of Early Byzantine art: the growing recognition that Greco-Roman styles, far from surviving only as a distant memory perpetuated through increasingly academic revivals, remained for centuries a vital force in Byzantine culture.⁶ In publications of the 1940s the Palace mosaic was attributed

⁴On the broader aspects of this question, see E. Kitzinger, “Christian Imagery: Growth and Impact,” in K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium* (Princeton-New York, 1980), 141–63.

⁵For the problems implicit in a teleological approach to the development of Byzantine art, see J. Trilling, “Late Antique and Sub-Antique, or the ‘Decline of Form’ Reconsidered,” *DOP* 41 (1987), 469–76.

⁶As early as 1929, with the publication of L. Matsulevich’s *Byzantinische Antike* (Berlin-Leipzig, 1929), it became known that fine works in the Greco-Roman tradition, in this case decorated silver vessels, were being produced in Byzantium as late as the 7th century. But it is only in more recent decades that systematic investigations have revealed the complex interaction of classical and anti-classical tendencies in Byzantine art. In particular, Kurt Weitzmann has shown how Greco-Roman survivals and revivals have shaped the entire history of Byzantine art, and Ernst Kitzinger has unraveled to a remarkable degree the interplay of styles in the early Byzantine centuries, showing how classical and abstract tendencies, far from following a straightforward linear progression, could coexist within a single period and even within a single work.

²For the political and institutional history of the period see A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire* (Madison-Milwaukee, 1952), chaps. 2–4. P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971), provides a wide-ranging insight into Late Antique culture and society.

³For a brief but comprehensive “definition” of the icon and its role in Byzantine culture, see H. Torp, “L’arte e l’artista delle icone” (with Engl. trans., “Icons and Icon Painters”), *Arte medievale* 2 (1984), 9–22.

to the early fifth century. In 1960 Cyril Mango and Irving Lavin suggested the late sixth century, and by 1963 it was possible for Per Jonas Nordhagen to argue for a date as late as ca. 700. Ernst Kitzinger's article "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm," published in 1958, marks a watershed in this development. Emphasizing the stylistic diversity of the period, Kitzinger established beyond doubt that the increasing abstraction which formed one facet of post-Justinianic art in no way precluded the flourishing of "perennial hellenism": naturalistic styles in which the Greco-Roman traditions continued with remarkably little change. It may be no more than coincidence that Mango and Lavin's examination of the Palace mosaic, the first to make the leap to a post-Justinianic date, appeared two years after Kitzinger's article, but Nordhagen explicitly acknowledges Kitzinger's innovative work, and David Wright's unified view of seventh-century art (1975) would be impossible without it.

Most scholars now agree that the Palace mosaic cannot be earlier than the reign of Justinian I (527–565). This *terminus post quem* relies on data from the original excavations, reevaluated in the light of new work in such areas as pottery and building techniques. The best arguments for the date of the mosaic have focused on three periods: the reigns of Justinian I (527–565), Tiberius I (578–582), and Justinian II (685–695, 705–711). All three hypotheses are consistent with the archaeological evidence. The second and third also represent attempts to correlate the mosaic with documented stages in the architectural history of the Palace. Since only meager and inaccessible ruins survive, this approach aims mainly at reconstructing the layout and appearance of the Palace from contemporary descriptions.⁷ Most important of these are the detailed accounts of court cere-

monial in the *Book of Ceremonies*, compiled by the tenth-century emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus but incorporating earlier material.⁸ Chronicles and other texts from as early as the fifth century record individual emperors' building, rebuilding, or use of various parts of the Palace.⁹ These accounts are of potential importance for the dating of the mosaic, since they hold out the hope of identifying and dating the structure to which it belonged. The difficulty lies in the fragmentation and ambiguity of the sources. The Palace was not a single building but a huge and constantly changing complex of buildings, and there is no known systematic record of its growth, or of its appearance in any one period. The surviving texts are unlikely to represent all the records ever kept of the Palace's construction, and even if they did, every building campaign need not have been fully and formally documented. In any case, no extant Byzantine text describes the peristyle and its mosaic. Arguments from textual material figure prominently in several discussions of the Palace mosaic, and I have taken full account of their value as corroborative evidence, but I have not attempted to confirm or contradict them in detail, or to substitute comparable arguments of my own.¹⁰

Changing perceptions of the history of Byzantine art have made it clear that the Palace mosaic is later, perhaps much later, than its discoverers could have imagined. No attempt has yet been made to combine this awareness with a broader understanding of the role which the Greco-Roman heritage played in Byzantine culture, or to bring a cultural perspective to the problem of the mosaic's date. As the most lavish and eclectic monument of Byzantine Hellenism, the Palace mosaic provides a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which Byzantine artists and patrons brought the values of antiquity, political and literary as well as visual, to bear on their own expressive needs. To understand the Palace mosaic in these terms is to under-

So many of Weitzmann's books and articles deal with the history of the classical tradition in Byzantium, that it would be pointless to try to single out individual works for citation here. A recent collection of his essays includes several works capable of introducing the reader to his range and method of scholarship, as well as a complete bibliography of his published work: see K. Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination* (Chicago, 1971). For Kitzinger's work on the interplay of classical and anti-classical styles, see his article "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm," *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress* (Munich, 1958), 1–50, repr. in E. Kitzinger, *Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Bloomington, 1976), 157–232; and idem, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977).

⁷Unfortunately it is no longer possible to study at first hand even the relatively small area of the Palace unearthed by the

Walker Trust excavations, as a bazaar now occupies the site. One may hope that this has preserved the site for future generations, since another type of construction, involving extensive foundations, would have obliterated it forever.

⁸Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *Le Livre des Cérémonies*, Greek text with trans. and comm. by Albert Vogt, 3 vols. (Paris, 1935).

⁹J. P. Richter, *Quelle der byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* (Vienna, 1897), 255 ff.

¹⁰For the most recent attempt to synthesize existing data on the layout of the Palace, see S. Miranda, "Etude sur le Palais Sacré de Constantinople: Le Walker Trust et le Palais de Daphné," *BSI* 44 (1983), 41–49 and 196–204.

stand the historical moment which made its creation possible. If a new attempt to date the mosaic is to be more than a review of familiar arguments, it must be based on these considerations. Above all, it must look beyond the mosaic's obvious classical affinities, which have actually tended to impede rather than promote an understanding of its character and purpose as a work of Byzantine art. In stylistic terms, this means turning from the mosaic's superficial conservatism to the features which mark it as the work of a particular time. In terms of subject matter and its interpretation, the need to look beyond the obvious is even stronger, since the Greco-Roman character of the scenes has largely been regarded as an end in itself, obscuring the need for further analysis.

In the sections which follow, I shall argue that the Palace mosaic dates from the first half of the seventh century: specifically, from the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610–641). This possibility has not been considered by other scholars; Heraclius is widely regarded as a military and political figure rather than a patron of the arts, and there is no record of Palace construction in his reign. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the Palace mosaic reveals remarkable correspondences with the events and ideological currents of this troubled and heroic period.

In the first decade of the seventh century, the incompetence of Emperor Phocas (602–610) brought the empire to the brink of catastrophe. In 610 Heraclius, son of the exarch (military governor) of Carthage, led a fleet to Constantinople to overthrow Phocas, and he himself assumed the throne. The political, military, and economic structure of the empire was in disarray, and its very existence was threatened by the Persians to the east and the Slavs and Avars to the west. In the face of humiliating defeats—most damaging to Byzantine morale was the sack of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614—Heraclius undertook profound military and administrative reforms aimed at nothing less than a complete reversal of the empire's fortunes. He was successful. Heraclius began his counter-offensive in 622, and won decisive victories over the Avars in 626 and over the Persians in 628.¹¹

The style of the Palace mosaic is fully compatible with a Heraclian date. Indeed, it is incompatible with any significantly earlier period. I shall show,

too, that despite its apparent lack of thematic coherence, the mosaic carries a political message of great complexity and power, consonant with the spirit of Heraclius' reforms and military leadership. It embraces the nature of civilization, the emperor's role in protecting civilization by protecting the empire, and the anarchic and destructive forces against which he must contend. These themes are almost universal in their appeal, but they have a particular immediacy for Heraclius' reign. They are not, however, *prima facie* evidence of a Heraclian date. It is the combination of *iconological and stylistic analysis* which enables us to establish a precise context for the mosaic. In turn, by understanding the mosaic's relation to a crucial time and a pivotal figure in Byzantine history we can appreciate the urgent message which its diverse, often lighthearted imagery so skillfully conceals. It is this underlying, unifying seriousness which gives my study its title. By setting out the goals of civilization and the means of achieving and preserving them, the Palace mosaic symbolically represents the empire in its most timeless and radical aspect. In a deeper sense, the mosaic shows that the same forces which threaten civilization also threaten the emperor himself, and that the measure of his fitness to rule is his ability to defeat these forces on the battleground of his own soul. By equating this inner struggle with the struggle to preserve civilization, the mosaic conveys the subtlest, most exalted, yet ultimately most humane of its symbolic lessons: that the soul of the emperor is the soul of the empire.

I. THE LITERATURE ON THE PALACE MOSAIC

The starting point for any discussion of the mosaic is the *First Report* on the excavation of the Palace, published in 1947 and dealing with the material uncovered between 1935 and 1938.¹² It consists of four chapters: on the buildings, by Gunter Martiny; on the pottery, by Robert B. K.

¹¹G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1957), 83–93; A. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, I (Amsterdam, 1968).

¹²*The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors. Being a First Report on Excavations Carried out in Istanbul on Behalf of the Walker Trust (The University of St. Andrews) 1935–1938* (Oxford, 1947). The small number of studies which appeared before the *First Report* do not concern us here, since they are based on incomplete information and were made obsolete by the more extensive account. An exception is G. Brett's article, "The Mosaic of the Great Palace in Constantinople," *JWarb* 5 (1942), 34–43. Chronologically it anticipates the appearance of the *First Report*, but it relies on Brett's own work and that of other members of the original expedition, much of which was to receive fuller treatment in that volume. It is appropriate, therefore, to discuss Brett's article after the *First Report*.

Stevenson; and on the mosaics and the small finds, by Gerard Brett. It is the chapters dealing with the buildings and mosaics that concern us here. The evidence analyzed by Martiny reveals two main stages in the architectural history of the peristyle (pp. 4 ff). The first is its construction, the second the walling-up of part of the colonnade, converting it into a "long hall or passage" (p. 9). The mosaic belongs to the first stage; in the second it was covered with a pavement of marble slabs. The mosaic overlies the remains of earlier structures. Pottery found beneath the mosaic has been attributed to the beginning of the fifth century, providing a terminus post quem for the construction of the peristyle (pp. 5, 16; cf. p. 31). Martiny also points to a fragmentary capital which, though not found in situ, corresponds in size to the column bases of the peristyle colonnade. On the basis of its acanthus ornament, he attributes it to the early fifth century (pp. 10–11), a date that he accepts for the construction of the peristyle as a whole. On the basis of earlier topographical studies, Martiny identifies the peristyle as the Heliakon (courtyard) of the Pharos.

It should be noted that Martiny does not seem to regard his archaeological evidence as conclusive for the dating of the mosaic; rather, in dating the building he relies heavily on the assumption that the mosaic belongs to the early fifth century. In doing so he follows the argument set forth by Brett in his chapter on the mosaic. However, Brett himself relies on the archaeological data furnished and analyzed by Martiny, in particular the pottery beneath the mosaic and the capital believed to be from the colonnade. These findings influence his interpretation of other, quite separate, evidence. Thus, while he examines the costumes, hairstyles, and weapons shown in the mosaic, and finds a number of analogues in the art of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, he does not consider the possibility that these usages continued into a later period (pp. 91–93). His analysis of the mosaic's style focuses on problems of pictorial space, specifically on the historical breakdown of the coherent spatial setting and the evolution of composition in registers (pp. 93–97). This process he traces into the sixth century, and it is in works of that period that he appears to find the closest analogies to the Palace mosaic. Nevertheless, as if unwilling to accept his own evidence, he continues to urge a date early in the reign of Theodosius II.

Brett's article, "The Mosaic of the Great Palace

in Constantinople," understandably assumes an early fifth-century date for the Palace mosaic. Brett's concern is iconographic, and he points out the generic relation of many of the individual scenes to other works of Late Antique art, in mosaic and in other media. The number of overtly mythological images is small; more important are scenes of pastoral and agricultural life, the circus, hunting, and animal combats. Brett admits that some of these last may have a symbolic meaning, but rejects the possibility that the mosaic as a whole has a unified program. Instead he emphasizes its decorative eclecticism, which he sees as part of a rich classical heritage that is unique to the Eastern Empire. He points, however, to the peculiar character of the artist's repertory, in which there "... seems to be no room ... for scenes of cultured urban life like building, trading, or feasting. There is nothing which would reveal an interest in the theatre ... in philosophical ideas, allegories, or in the more literary and historical aspects of the antique tradition" (p. 42). This phenomenon he would seem to connect with the relative newness of Constantinople as an urban center. More central to his argument, however, is his insistence on a strong classical current existing apart from what he regards as the "learned," "literary," or "humanist" tradition.

The *Second Report* on the Palace, published in 1958, incorporates work carried out between 1952 and 1954 under the direction of David Talbot Rice, who was largely responsible for the text of the volume.¹³ This second campaign of excavations not only uncovered a further large area of the mosaic and the remains of a large apsed hall adjacent to and contemporary with the peristyle, with which it appears to have formed an architectural unit. A further discovery has direct implications for the mosaic's date. A badly damaged area of mosaic was removed, permitting more extensive examination of the substructures than had previously been possible. Three marble capitals were found under the mosaic, of which Talbot Rice remarks: "It cannot be asserted that they belonged to the building, but *they must certainly be earlier than the mosaic*" (p. 17, italics mine). The capitals are crude and seemingly unfinished, making their dating much more difficult, but on the basis of comparisons with more securely dated works Talbot Rice is able to assert that

¹³ David Talbot Rice, ed., *The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors. Second Report* (Edinburgh, 1958).



A Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, Oceanus head, detail from outer border, southwest side



B Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, boy feeding a donkey, detail from northeast side (photo: Hans Hinz)



C Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, boys riding a led camel, detail from northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



D Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, man milking a goat, detail from northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)

they "could be as late as the end of the sixth century and are in any event not likely to be much earlier than the end of the fifth" (p. 17).

The evidence of the capitals directly contradicts Martiny and Brett's admittedly rather tenuous argument for an early fifth-century date. However, while Talbot Rice is willing to set aside the work of his predecessors in this regard, he seems reluctant to accept the full implications of his discovery. The *Second Report* includes extensive comparisons between the Palace mosaic and other mosaics from all parts of the empire. But in his search for comparative material, Talbot Rice cites far more pre-Justinianic than Justinianic or post-Justinianic works, and his account of the stylistic affinities of the Palace mosaic concludes as follows: "The most that can be said, on the evidence of style, is that the floor is later than about 400 and earlier than ca. 530. . . . A date between 450 and 500 seems, on the stylistic evidence, the most likely" (p. 148).

At best, then, Talbot Rice opts for the earliest date permitted by the capitals found beneath the mosaic. At worst, he implicitly rejects them as evidence. The reason would seem to be his conviction that changes took place in the reign of Justinian which would have made the creation of such a work as the Palace mosaic inconceivable. Thus we read that the style of the mosaic, which Talbot Rice calls "neo-Attic," "had reached its full development by the later rather than the earlier part of the fifth century. By 550 or thereabouts the controlling influence of Justinian had resulted in the establishment of a completely new manner, the true Byzantine . . ." (p. 160). It is worth noting in this connection that while Talbot Rice recognizes the general thematic and stylistic affinity between the Palace mosaic and the decorated silver plates in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad, he speaks of the plates as "firmly dated to the later fifth and sixth centuries" (p. 159). It was already well known that the Hermitage plates form a sequence extending well into the seventh century. Talbot Rice further speaks of one of the David plates in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in such a way as to imply that it too was of fifth- or sixth-century date, whereas it too was known to date from the seventh century.¹⁴

In a chapter on the identification of the peristyle, written with J. B. Ward-Perkins, Talbot Rice rejects the earlier hypothesis that the mosaic area

corresponded to the Heliakon of the Pharos (pp. 163 ff). More serious consideration is given to an article on the Palace by Cyril Mango, connecting the site with Emperor Marcian (450–457).¹⁵ Talbot Rice tentatively accepts the attribution to Marcian, but asserts that there is insufficient evidence to establish whether that emperor was responsible for the peristyle itself or for the stage of construction immediately preceding it. One would suppose that the evidence of the capitals would play an important role in determining the answer, but no firm conclusion is offered. In summing up the evidence, Talbot Rice states only that "stylistic parallels . . . although they do not preclude a date as late as the sixth century, certainly tend to favor one within the limits of the fifth. On the other hand the evidence offered by our study of the structure points firmly toward the sixth . . ." (p. 166). Apparently yielding at the last moment to the strength of the structural evidence, he then goes so far as to suggest an attribution to Justin II (565–578), without, however, discussing the implications of this late date for the study of the mosaic (p. 167).

A review of the *Second Report* by Cyril Mango and Irving Lavin appeared in *The Art Bulletin* in 1960 (42, pp. 67–73). In this collaborative work, Mango interprets the archaeological material relating to the Palace buildings, and Lavin deals with art-historical issues, especially those involving the mosaic. Mango begins by noting the importance of the capitals found beneath the mosaic. He also points out that the building techniques used in the apsed hall which is linked to the peristyle in both time and function are "most clearly paralleled in the buildings of Justinian's period," and that bricks found beneath the mosaic bear stamps of a kind not found before Justinian. "This accords so well with the evidence of the capitals and the occurrence of what is usually regarded as Justinianic brickwork . . . under the apsed hall that it is difficult to avoid drawing the natural conclusion: the peristyle with its mosaics cannot be earlier than the reign of Justinian, and is in all probability later . . ." (p. 69). Mango explicitly rejects, on the basis of the *Second Report*, his own earlier ascription of the peristyle to Emperor Marcian. The date he now proposes is "towards the end of the sixth century, since the style of the mosaic as well as historical factors would appear to preclude a date after the beginning of

¹⁴ Matsulevich, *Byzantinische Antike*, 22–23.

¹⁵ C. Mango, "Autour du Grand Palais de Constantinople," *CahArch* 5 (1951), 179–86.

the seventh century (p. 69, italics mine; Mango never actually states what factors preclude a later date). A passage from the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus describes how Emperor Tiberius (578–582) pulled down and rebuilt a large area of the Palace. While acknowledging that there is no hard evidence to identify the excavation site with the area described in the text, Mango tentatively attributes the peristyle to Tiberius' building campaign. He notes that "The next emperor who is known to have undertaken a major replanning of this area is Justinian II (first reign, 685–695), but he is too late to be considered" (p. 70).

Lavin begins his section by discussing the architectural complex of the peristyle and apsed hall, which he sees as a western usage transplanted to the east in the late fourth or early fifth century. Turning to the mosaic itself, he discerns three types of subject matter: rustic scenes, amphitheater scenes (he equates the depiction of hunting with the *venationes* of the games), and mythological or fantasy scenes. "Try as one may," he says, "one can discover no coherent theme or system that would suggest an iconographic program in the ordinary sense. But despite or perhaps just because of the variety, the ensemble does convey a definite mood, which G. Brett aptly defines as a kind of poetic romanticism" (p. 72). Lavin goes on to connect the uncertainty about the date of the mosaic with the contradictory nature of its style. "The figures on the whole show a full plasticity, a richness of coloration, and an understanding of organic structural relationships that are worthy of the best Hellenistic tradition. They are placed, however, in a totally abstract space, absolutely without depth and atmosphere—a space in other words that is profoundly medieval" (p. 72). A similar dichotomy between the treatment of figures and space is found in other eastern mosaics, notably at Antioch and Apamea, between ca. 450 and ca. 550. However, as in the case of the combination of peristyle and apsed hall, Lavin sees this as originally a western phenomenon. Earlier North African mosaics, in particular, "show a very definite development . . . wherein the atmospheric space of the Hellenistic legacy is transformed into a depthless medium through which the figures can be distributed more or less *ad usum*" (p. 72).¹⁶ Lavin poses, without at-

tempting to answer it, the question of whether the Palace mosaic "was influenced from such relatively secondary quarters as Antioch and Apamea," or whether the Syrian mosaics "reflect developments in Constantinople of which . . . we have no record . . ." (p. 73). He does not see the classical figure style as an obstacle to a date in the mid to late sixth century, since such a style "is one of the most frequently recurring phenomena in Byzantine art" (p. 73). The appearance of the mosaic is thus found to be fully compatible with the date proposed by Mango in his section of the review.

An article by Per Jonas Nordhagen, published in 1963, is the first discussion of the Palace mosaic to reject explicitly the idea that classical style implies an early date.¹⁷ According to Nordhagen, "the sixth century does not represent the very last period in which we can find classically-inspired art in Constantinople" (p. 54). Having reviewed the archaeological data provided by the excavators and interpreted by Mango and Lavin, he concludes that "the *ante quem* given by Mango—'not after the beginning of the seventh century'—is based on the style and on the absence of sources rather than on any archaeological evidence" (p. 56). Nordhagen goes on to examine those works which carry the classical tradition through and even past the seventh century. Thus the silver plates which had previously been used as evidence for a sixth-century date for the mosaic are shown to point even more cogently to the seventh century. Other classicizing monuments of relatively late date include frescoes of the mid-seventh and early eighth centuries in the church of S. Maria Antiqua in Rome, the frescoes of Castelseprio, and the early eighth-century mosaics of the Omayyad mosque in Damascus. Both general and specific parallels between these works and the Palace mosaic show that "the mosaics of the Great palace of Constantinople, while having not much in common with what we know of the art of the sixth century, do possess certain characteristics which are well-known in Byzantine art of the seventh and early eighth century" (p. 64).

Nordhagen then reexamines the textual evidence for the construction of the Palace. Emperor Justinian II (first reign, 685–695), dismissed by Mango as "too late to be considered," is known to have constructed "a large triclinium, the Justinianos, to which a courtyard . . . seems to have been

¹⁶The problem of space in Late Roman floor mosaics, and the possibility of extensive North African influence on stylistic developments in the Eastern Empire, were subsequently given systematic treatment by Lavin in his article "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch and Their Sources," *DOP* 17 (1963), 181–286.

¹⁷P. J. Nordhagen, "The Mosaics of the Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors," *BZ* 56 (1963), 53–68.

attached . . ." (p. 66). The placement of the excavated peristyle and apsed hall in relation to the Hippodrome corresponds to what can be inferred from the sources regarding the placement of the Justinianos. Therefore, having found no conflict between the classical style of the mosaic and such a late date, Nordhagen attributes the mosaic to the very end of the seventh century, and identifies it with the work of Emperor Justinian II.

No later date has been advanced for the Palace mosaic. In an article published in 1965, David Talbot Rice sums up the current views on the question.¹⁸ He concludes that three dates are possible. Two of them he presents without new evidence: Mango's attribution to the reign of Tiberius (578–582) and Nordhagen's attribution to the end of the seventh century, which Talbot Rice calls "perhaps the most probable on the evidence of topography." For a Justinianic date, however, he offers new evidence from the work of J. W. Hayes on Late Roman ceramics. Hayes identifies the pottery fragments found beneath the setting bed of the mosaic as belonging to a type dated around 530.¹⁹ Talbot Rice recognizes both the importance and the limitations of this discovery: "This filling was beyond any possibility of doubt put there as a foundation for the mosaic floor, and the date of the placing of the filling and the setting of the mosaics must be the same. The filling was, however, brought from elsewhere, and there is always the possibility that it was taken from a dump of earlier date. What it does prove, beyond any doubt, is that the mosaic floor is later than c. 530" (p. 5). He concludes by tentatively accepting "the archaeological evidence in favor of a date in the reign of Justinian I, coupled with the known activity of that emperor as a builder . . ." (p. 5).

In view of these conclusions, it is surprising that the next study of the Palace mosaic, by Francesco d'Andria, should ignore both archaeological and textual evidence in favor of a pre-Justinianic date.²⁰ D'Andria dismisses the stylistic resemblances between the mosaic and later works, such as the silver plates, as due to the fact that the later

artists were imitating earlier models, and finds more telling analogies in the art of the late fifth and very early sixth centuries.

Although the conclusions of Brett and Lavin regarding the lack of a coherent symbolic system or program in the mosaic have been widely accepted, an article by Stefan Hiller, published in 1969, does offer a systematic iconological interpretation.²¹ I shall discuss Hiller's argument in my section on the mosaic and its meaning. For the moment it is enough to note that Hiller believes the mosaic to be a representation of Christian doctrine as prefigured in pagan culture and in the natural world.

David Wright's study, "The Shape of the Seventh Century in Byzantine Art," seeks to fix the Palace mosaic within a carefully ordered sequence of seventh-century monuments.²² Wright sees the century in terms of two major classical revivals, one under Heraclius (610–641) and the other under Justinian II. The difference between the styles of these two periods is explained as follows: ". . . under Heraclius there was a general renewal of perennial Hellenism in Byzantine guise, while Justinian II seems to have sought specifically a revival of the art of the first Justinian. . . . Thus the Heraclian period is characterized by voluminous figures which tend to move freely in an indefinite space, while the figures of Justinian II are more plastic and substantial, more clearly articulated by linear design, and some are given a consciously constructed spatial setting. At the risk of oversimplification, the Heraclian style can be characterized as painterly, that of Justinian II as linear" (p. 9). Within this scheme, Wright accepts Nordhagen's attribution of the mosaic to Justinian II. The works he cites as parallels date from the early eighth century, and include frescoes from S. Maria Antiqua in Rome and such Byzantine-derived Arab works as the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the Damascus Mosque, and the frescoes of Kuseir 'Amra. Wright sees the repertory of motifs in the Palace mosaic as indicative of a Justinianic revival, but finds an awkwardness in the mosaic which is absent from works of the earlier period.

In an article published in 1983, I reviewed the various arguments for the date of the mosaic, and

¹⁸"On the Date of the Mosaic Floor of the Great Palace at Constantinople," *Charistērion eis Anastasion K. Orlandon* (Athens, 1965), 1–5; repr. in D. Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art and Its Influences* (London, 1973), n.p.

¹⁹ Hayes' findings had not yet been published when Talbot Rice wrote his article; now see J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1972), 418.

²⁰"Note sui mosaici del Palazzo Imperiale di Costantinopoli," *Contributi dell'Istituto di Archeologia* (Milan, Università Cattolica), 2 (1966), 99–109.

²¹"Divino Sensus Agnoscere: Zur Deutung des Mosaikbodens im Peristyl des Grossen Palästes zu Konstantinopel," *Kairos* 11 (1969), 275–305.

²²First Annual Byzantine Studies Conference (Cleveland, 1975), *Abstracts of Papers*, 9–28. Wright's work is only nominally an abstract: it is presented as work in progress, but in both length and detail it is a full-scale study.

questioned whether the choice must be restricted to the reigns of Justinian I, Tiberius, and Justinian II.²³ I suggested the possibility of a date in the second quarter of the seventh century, primarily on the basis of stylistic and thematic parallels between the mosaic and dated seventh-century silver. However, I emphasized that such a conclusion must remain tentative until further research clarifies the differences between silver-work of the sixth and seventh centuries.

Anthony Cutler's article, "The Elephants of the Great Palace Mosaic,"²⁴ approaches the mosaic stylistically, but its underlying concern is methodological. Rather than attempting to date the mosaic, Cutler suggests ways of investigating its sources, with a view to replacing the present general assumption of its "Hellenistic" character with a more rigorous understanding. By way of example, he argues that the naturalistic depictions of African and Indian elephants in the Palace floor have no parallels in Late Roman art, and must therefore be derived from earlier models of distinct and recognizable periods. Cutler emphasizes the need for similar analysis of each of the mosaic's many subjects: "Only when this has been done for the vast mosaic as a whole will we have a just appreciation of its sources and thereby an understanding of the visual resources available to, and the creative processes employed by, those who made the Constantinopolitan pavement" (p. 129).

Articles by Werner Jobst of the Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut, who is in charge of the joint Austrian-Turkish project to restore the Palace mosaic, deal mainly with the mosaic's physical state and the work of restoration.²⁵ Jobst offers no new archaeological evidence for the mosaic's date, and seems to favor an attribution to the reign of Justinian.

Gisela Hellenkemper Salies' study of the mosaic, "Die Datierung der Mosaiken im Grossen Palast zu Konstantinopel,"²⁶ is the first to dispute systematically the archaeological evidence for a terminus post quem in Justinian's reign. Examining in turn the capitals, brick stamps, building techniques, and pottery, she finds each of them compatible with a date as much as a century earlier than has been

believed possible since the publication of the *Second Report* and Mango and Lavin's review (pp. 281–84). She concludes: "Ein gesicherter Terminus post quem für eine Datierung der Mosaiken innerhalb einer enger umgrenzten Zeitspanne lässt sich dem bisherigen archäologischen Befund nicht entnehmen. Weder eine Datierung innerhalb des 5. noch des 6. Jahrhunderts ist auf dieser Grundlage mit Bestimmtheit zu befürworten oder auszuschliessen" (p. 284). Freed from the necessity of a Justinianic or post-Justinianic date, she links the Palace mosaic to the "figure-carpet" mosaics of the fifth century, a development she identifies specifically with Syria (pp. 297–308). Her closest parallels are with the hunting mosaic from Apamea (which she dates to the first half of the fifth century, rejecting as evidence its controversial inscription of 539) and the animal mosaic from the Hall of Philia at Antioch. On this basis she attributes the Palace mosaic to the second third of the fifth century (p. 304).²⁷

II. STYLE AND DATE

The Palace mosaic consists of a multiple border dominated by a lavish inhabited scroll, and an uninterrupted field of white tesserae set in a scale or fan pattern. Within this field, approximately

²⁷ Salies presented a shorter version of her study in 1986, at the 17th International Byzantine Congress in Washington, D.C. That version dealt only with stylistic, not archaeological issues, and her findings were not published in full until after the completion of my own study. Having seen her article, I do not feel it necessary to make any substantive changes in my argument. Salies' reevaluation of the archaeological material has an important negative or warning value: taken piece by piece, and probed ruthlessly for weak points, the "concrete" evidence for a terminus post quem in the 6th century appears largely circumstantial. But it is the general agreement of so many different kinds of evidence that is convincing. There is an element of special pleading in Salies' arguments. Even if technically valid, they seem stretched to fit her interpretation of the Palace mosaic's style. This interpretation is the real basis for her dating, and here we are in fundamental disagreement. I accept the dating of the Apamea hunt mosaic to 539 in accordance with its inscription, and in any case I find the resemblances between the Palace mosaic and the Apamea and Antioch (Philia) mosaics to be misleading. On the basis of composition alone, I do not believe that the Palace mosaic can be earlier than the reign of Justinian. These issues are discussed in detail in the following section.

I would like to return briefly to one of Salies' archaeological points. Dismissing the possibility of dating the capitals found under the peristyle, she says: "Da sie in Bosse gelassen wurden, ist nicht zu entscheiden, wie sie nach Fertigstellung ausgesehen haben könnten. Es ist methodisch nicht zulässig, einen um 500 oder 600 entstandenen Kapitelltyp zu suchen, der aus der Bosse hätte geschlagen werden können, und mit diesem Vergleich den Rohling zu datieren" (p. 281). Although the capital

²³ J. Trilling, "Sinai Icons: Another Look," *Byzantion* 53 (1983), 300–311.

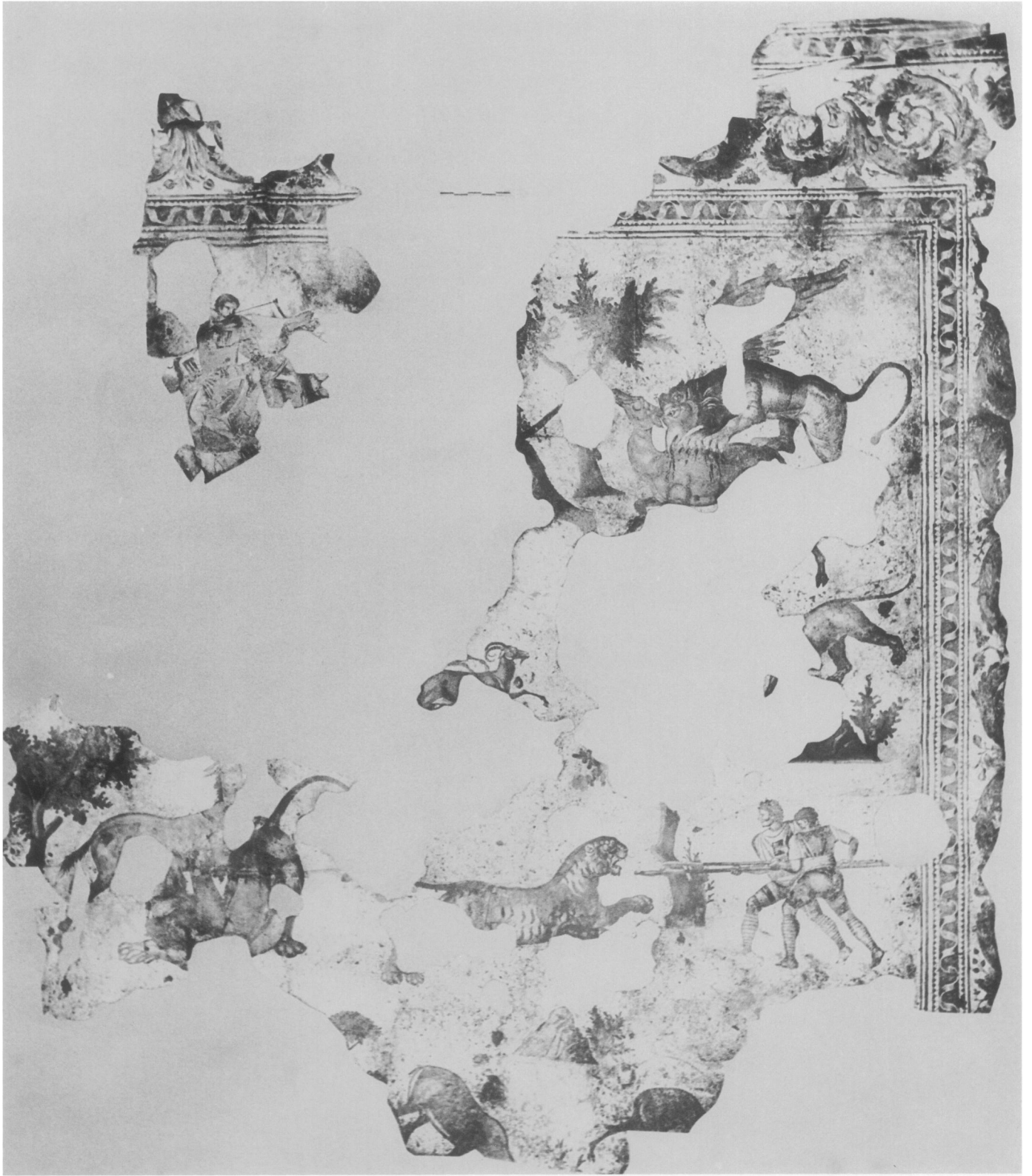
²⁴ *BullAIEMA* 10 (1985), 125–31.

²⁵ "Das Österreichisch-Türkische Project zur Restaurierung der Palast-Mosaiken," *Wiener Berichte über Naturwissenschaft in der Kunst* 2/3 (1985–86), 133–36; "Der Kaiserpalast von Konstantinopel und seine Mosaiken," *Antike Welt* 18, 3 (1987), 2–22.

²⁶ *BJ* 187 (1987), 273–308.



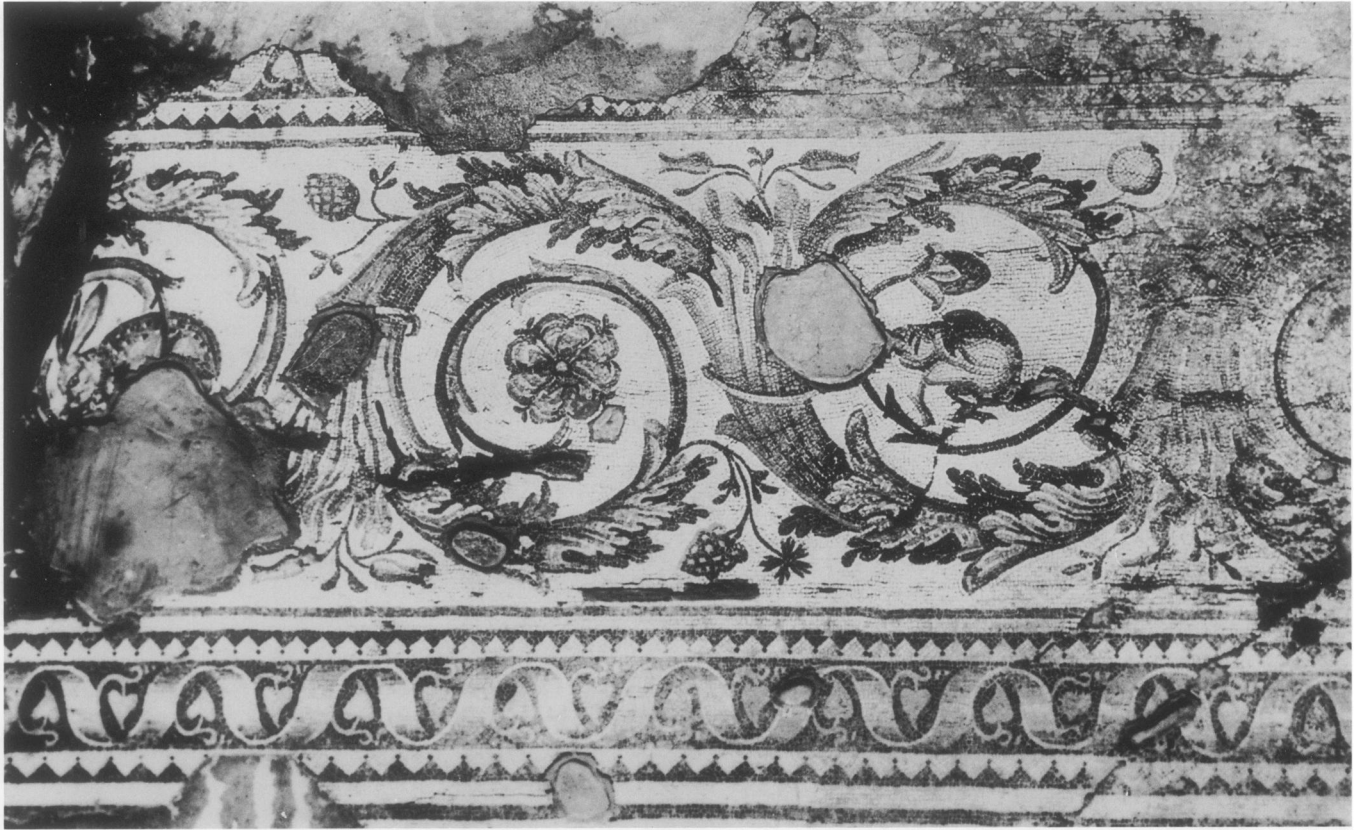
1 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, scenes from northeast side
(photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



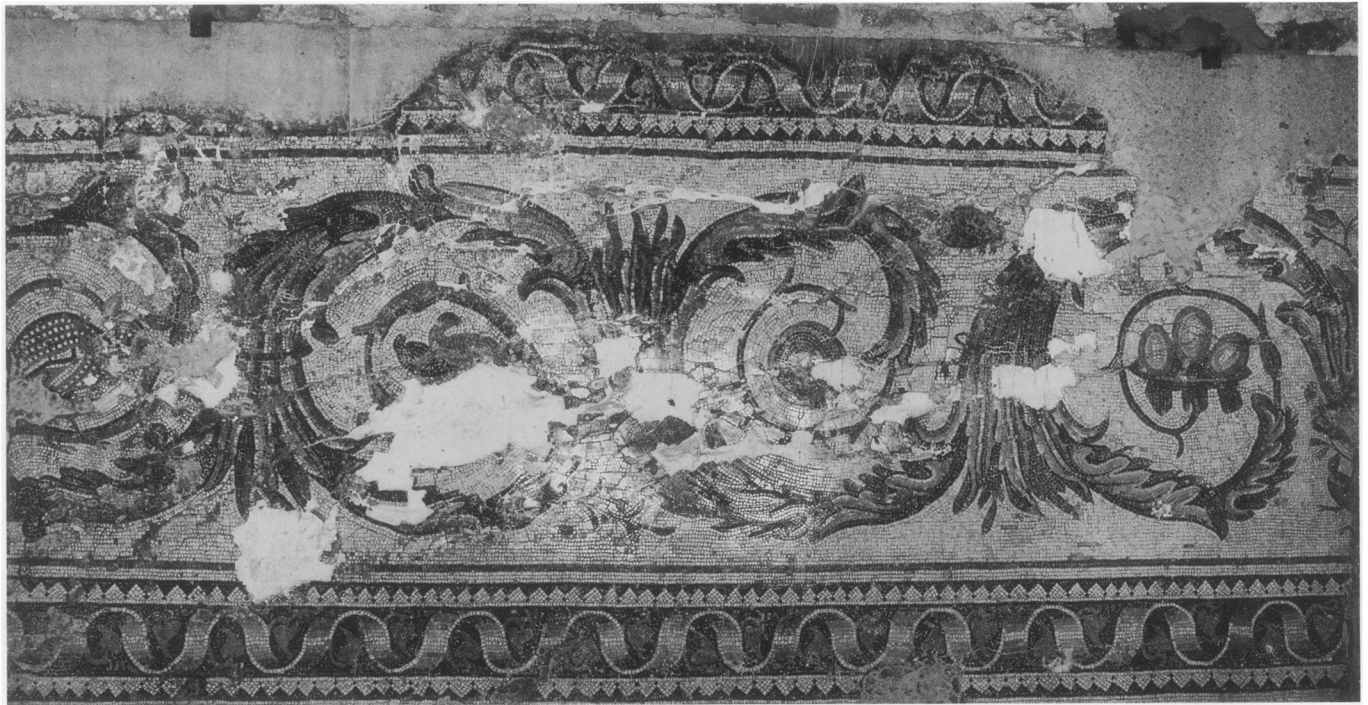
2 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, scenes from north corner
(photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



3 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, scenes from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



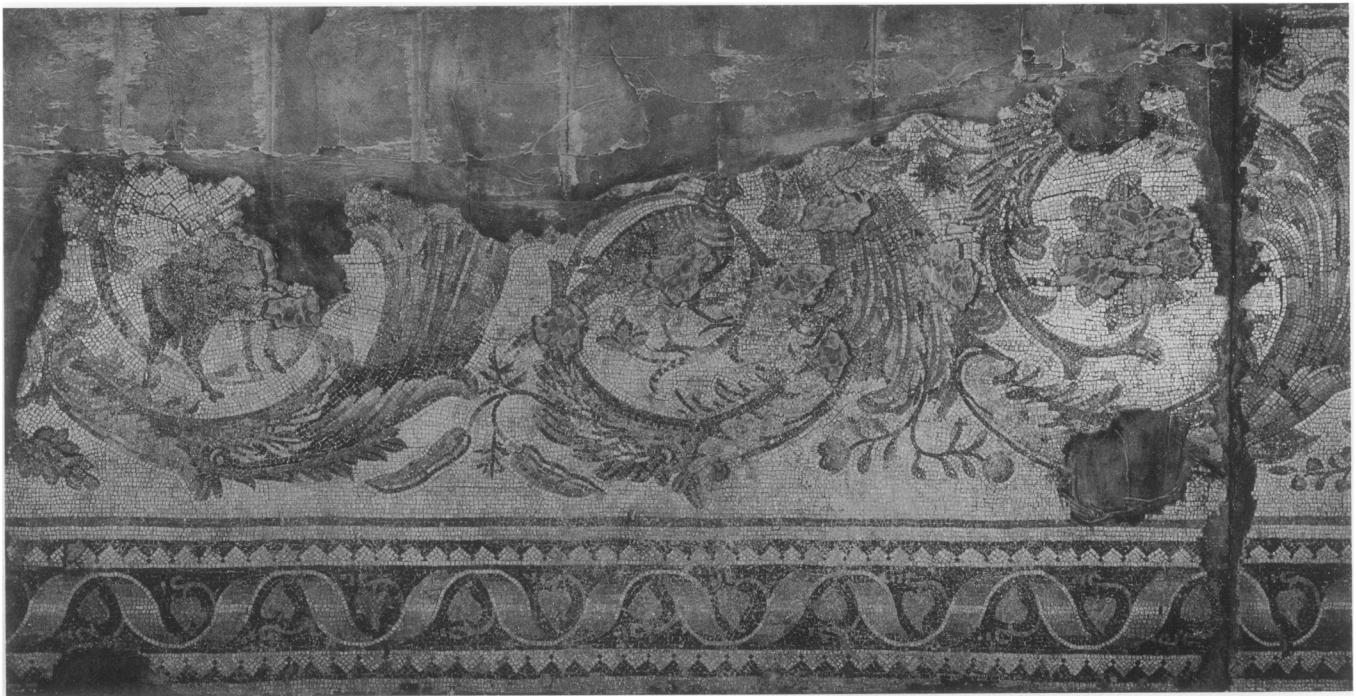
4 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, inhabited scroll, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



5 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, inhabited scroll, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



6 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, inhabited scroll, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



7 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, inhabited scroll, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



8 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, inhabited scroll, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



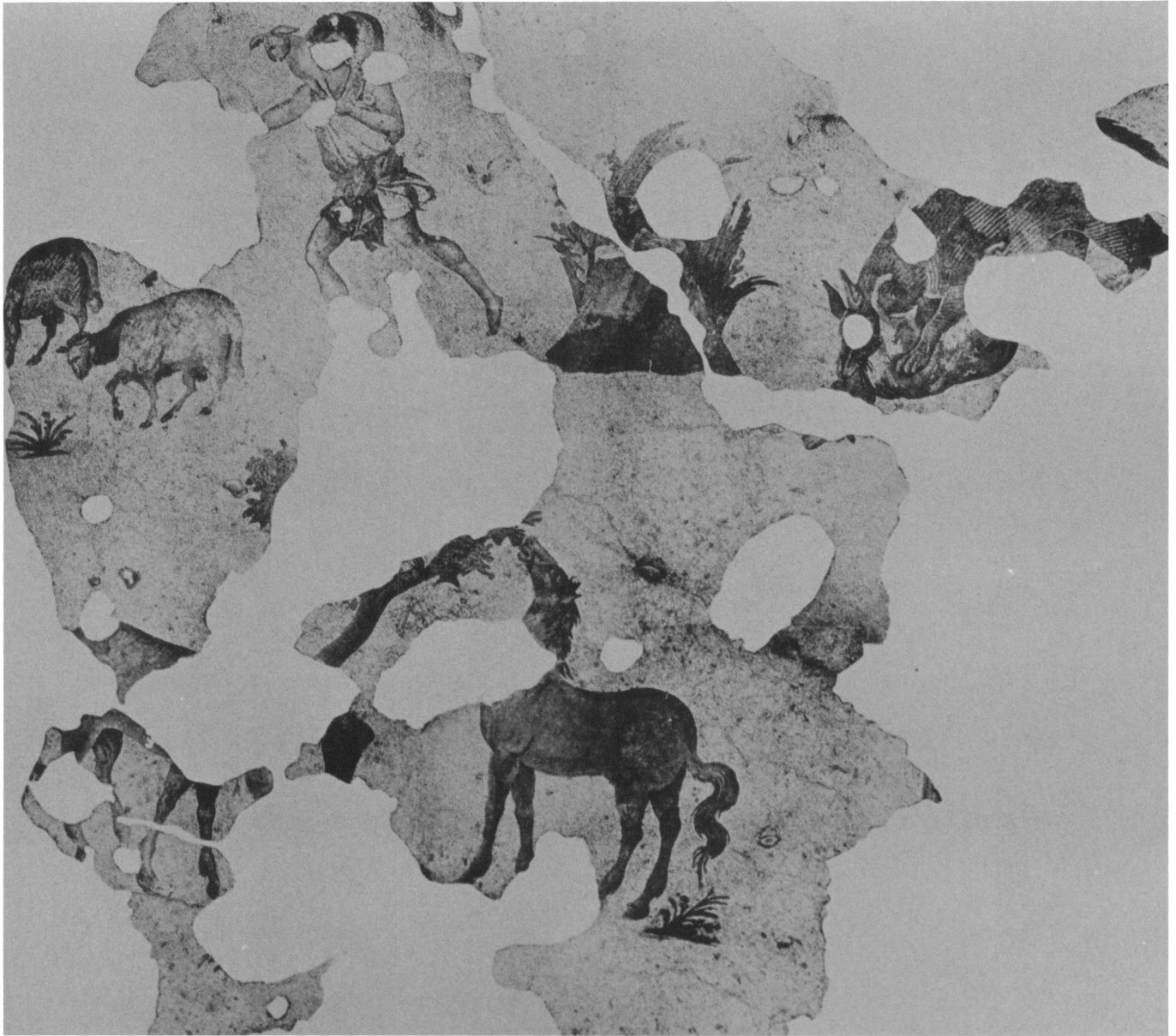
9 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, head, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



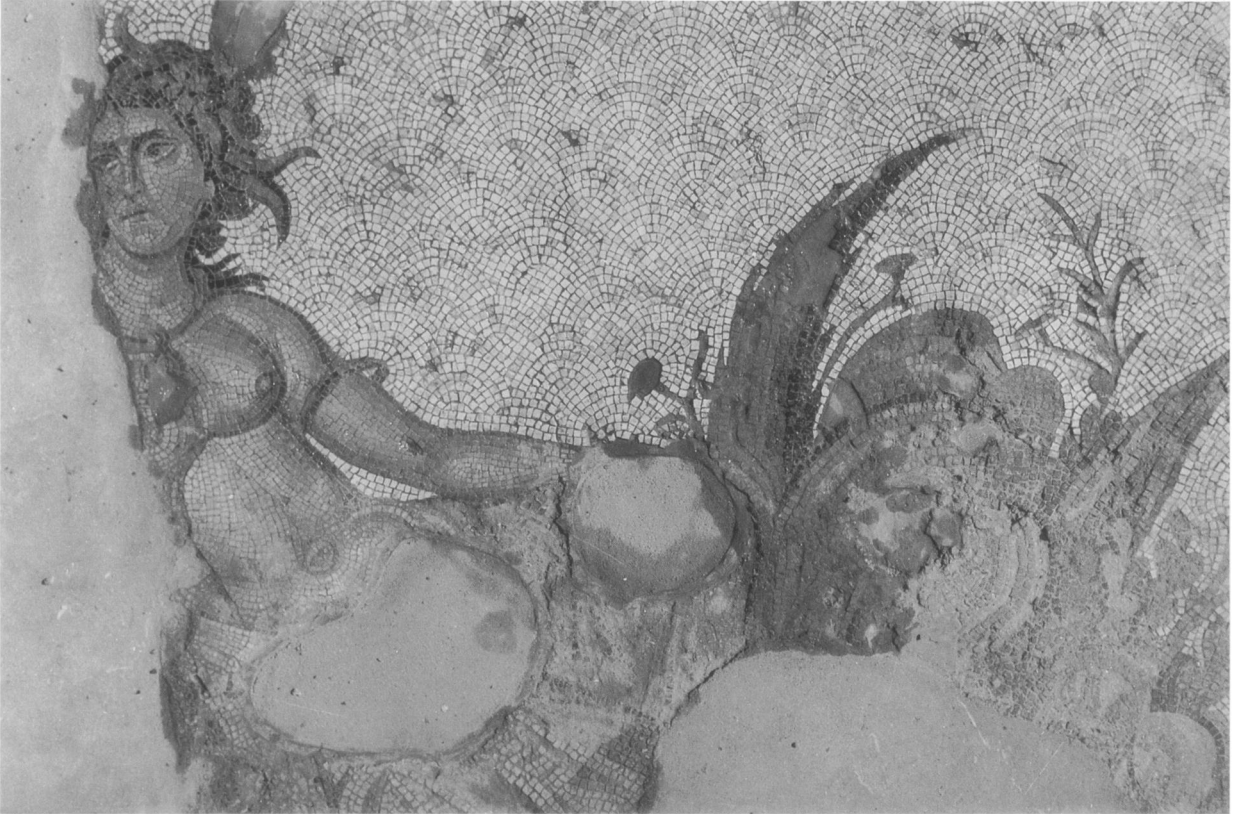
10 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, head, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



11 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, head, detail from inner border, northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



12 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, scenes from southwest side
(after *First Report*)



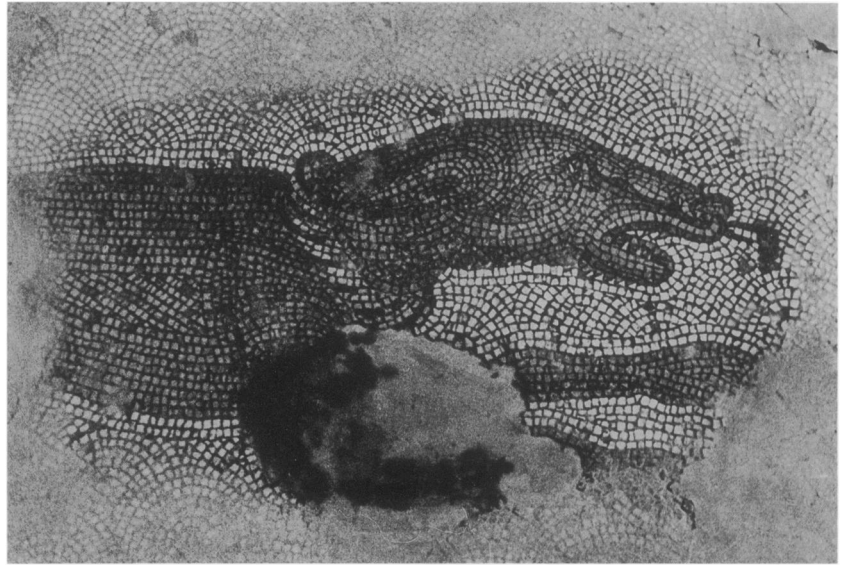
13 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, reclining female figure, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



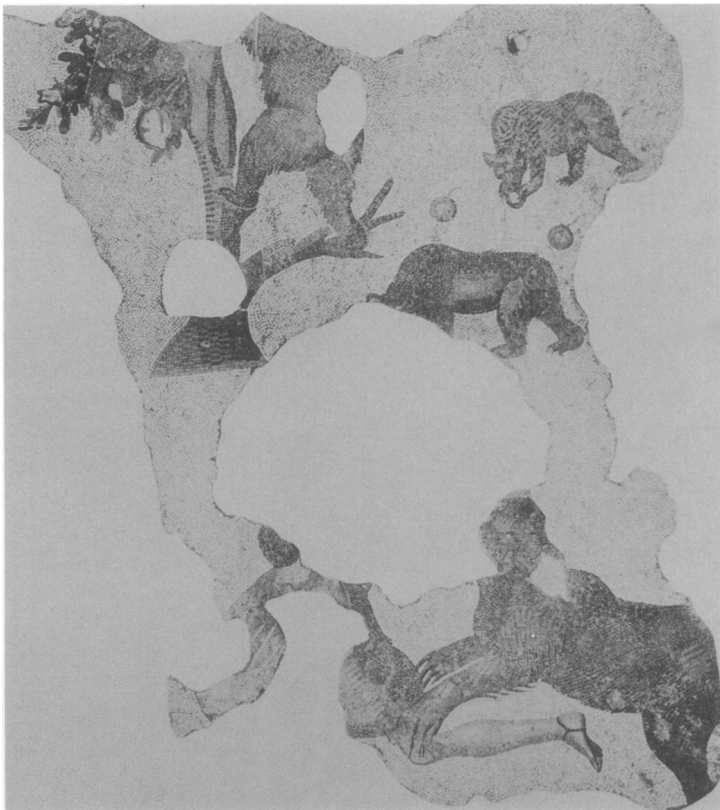
14 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, goats, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



15 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, leopard and deer, detail from southwest side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



16 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, hound from hare hunt, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



17 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, bear family and fleeing man, detail from southwest side (after *First Report*)



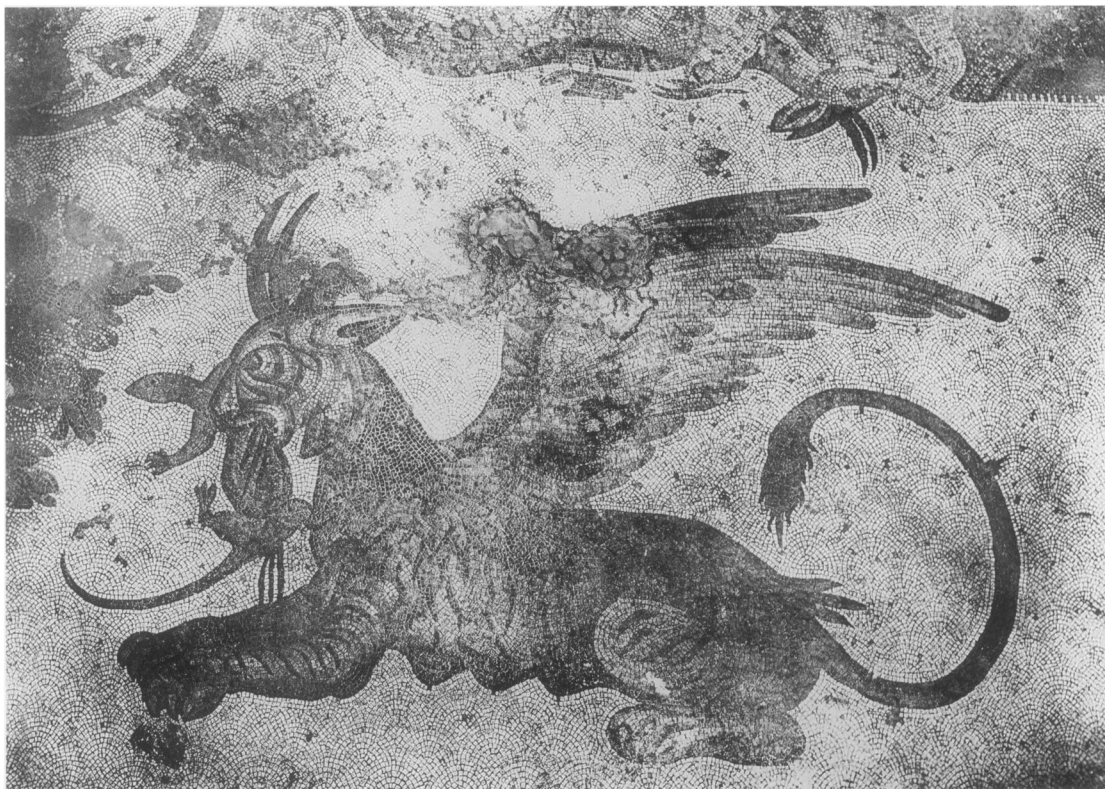
18 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, mounted hunter, detail from northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



19 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, boys on a camel, detail from northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



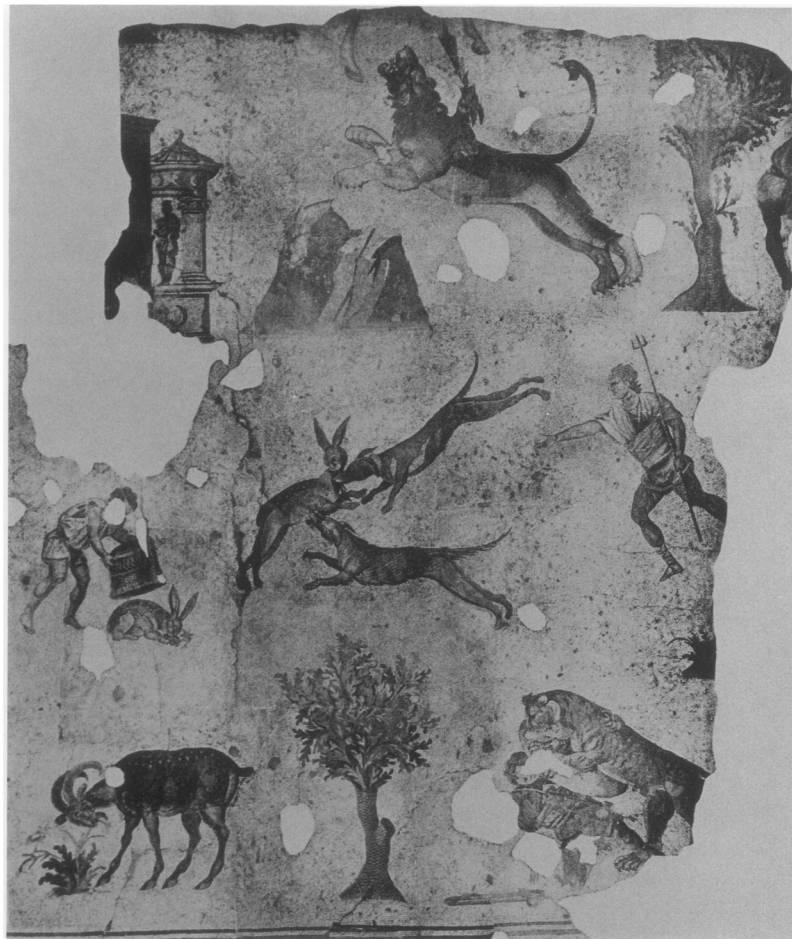
20 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace,
bear and kid, detail from northeast side
(photo: J. Powell, Rome)



21 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, griffin and lizard, detail from northeast side
(photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



22 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace,
seated man, detail from northeast side
(photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



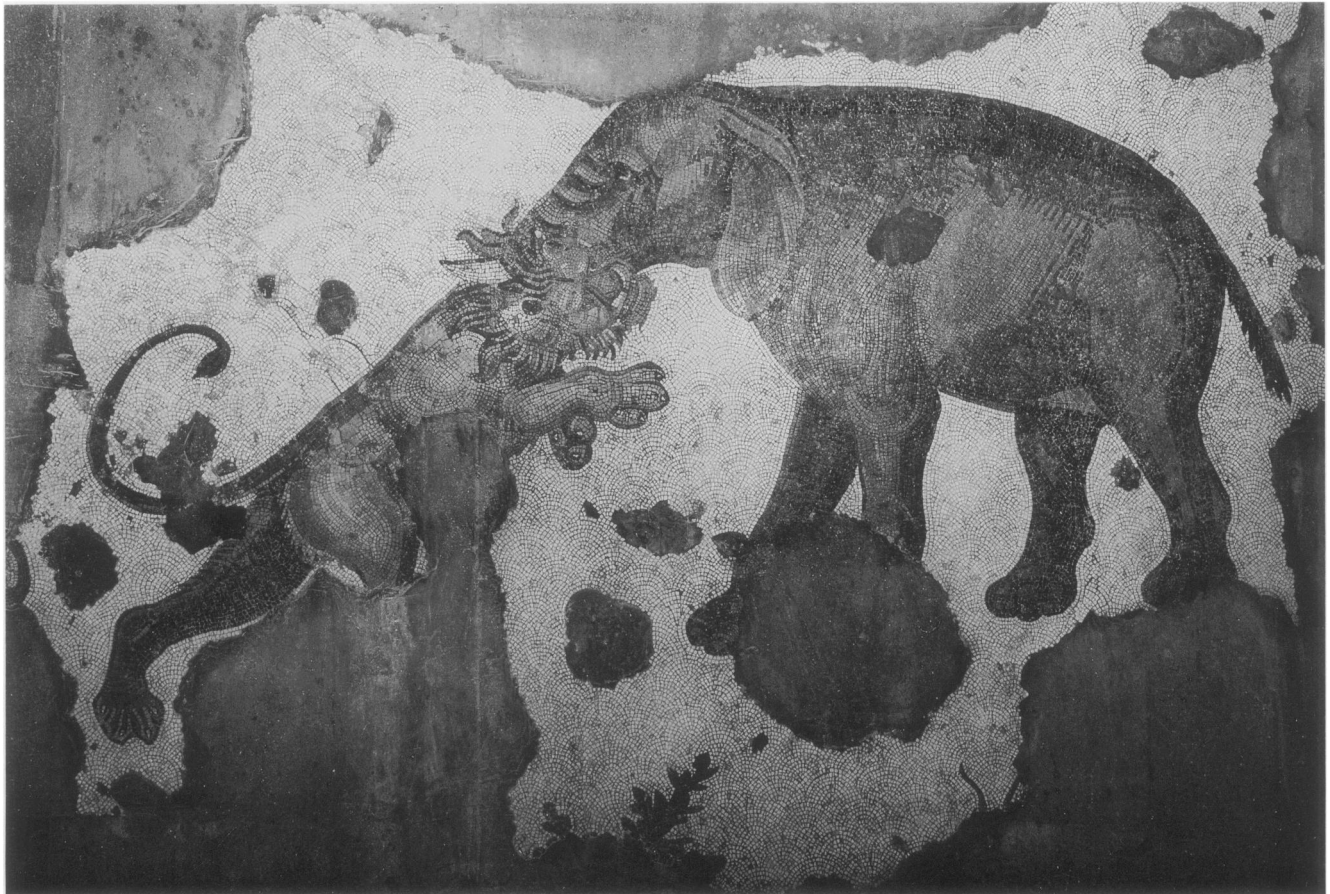
23 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace,
scenes from northeast side (after *First Report*)



24 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, Samson and the lion, detail from southwest side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



25 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, satyr and child, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



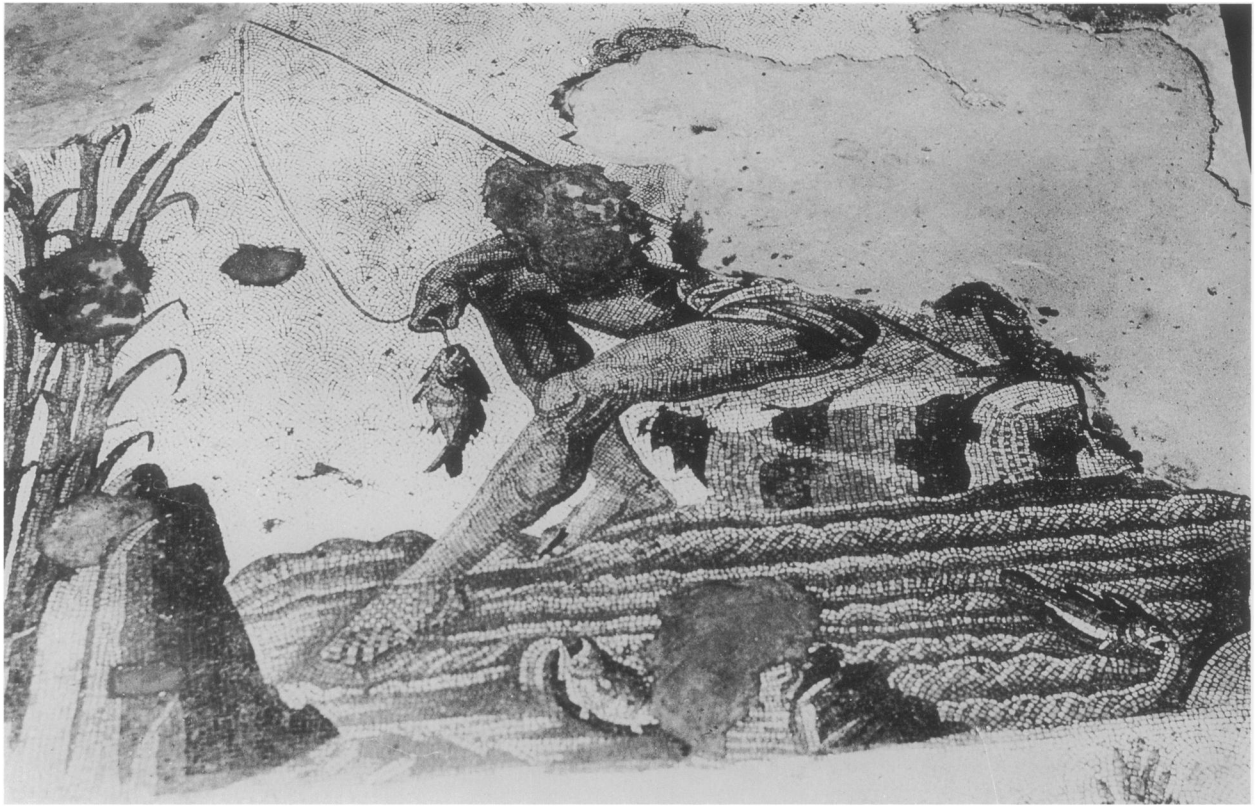
26 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, elephant and lion, detail from southwest side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



27 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, herdsman with lute and dog, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



28 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, two spearmen and tiger, detail from north corner (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



29 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, fisherman, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



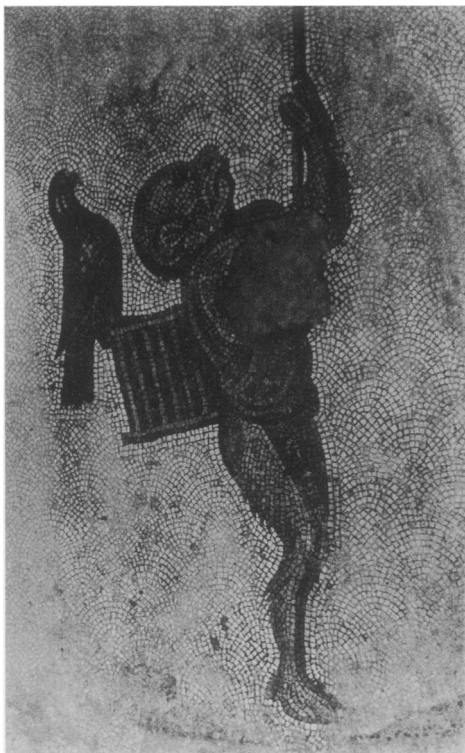
30 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, herdsman and lamb, detail from southwest side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



31 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, wolf and sheep, detail from southwest side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



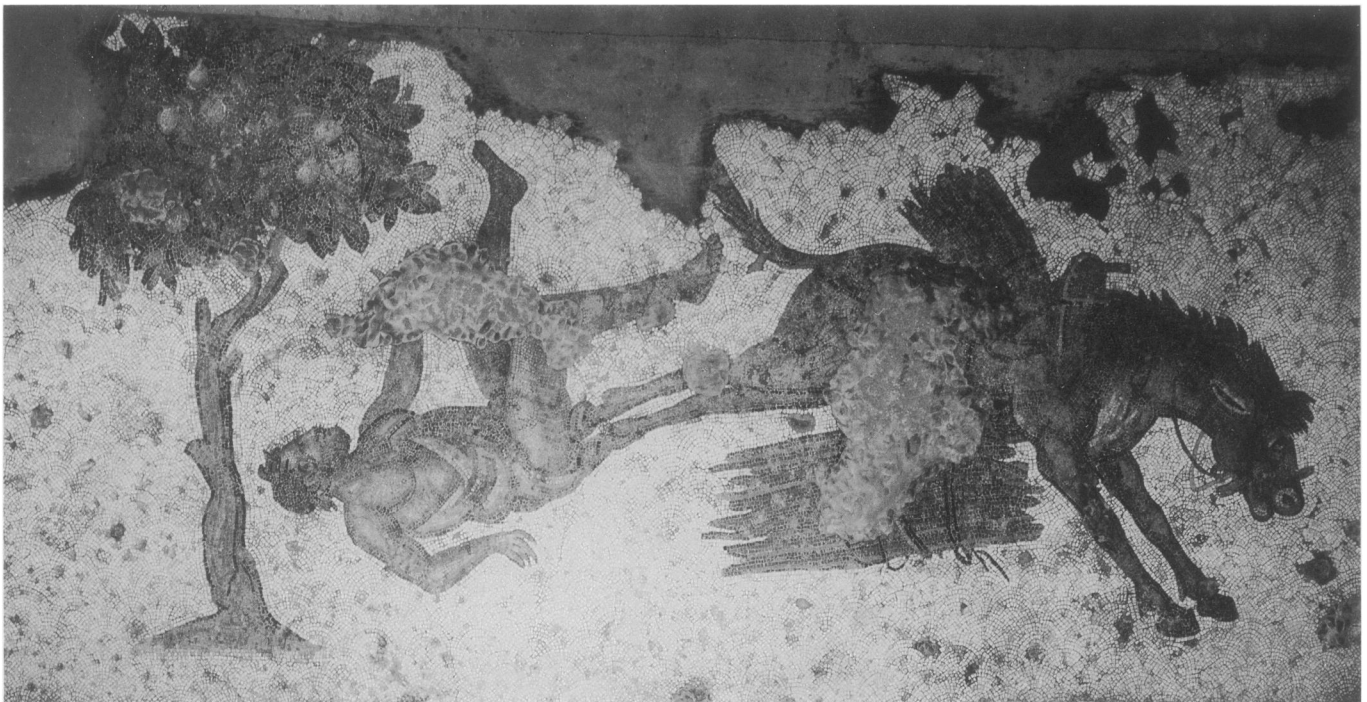
32 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, woman nursing a baby, detail from northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



33 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, monkey, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



34 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, men hoeing, detail from northeast side
(photo: J. Powell, Rome)



35 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, man kicked by a mule, detail from northeast side
(photo: J. Powell, Rome)



36 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, foot-soldier, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



37 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, foot-soldier with raised spear, detail from the northeast side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



38 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, soldier and leopard, detail from southwest side (photo: J. Powell, Rome)



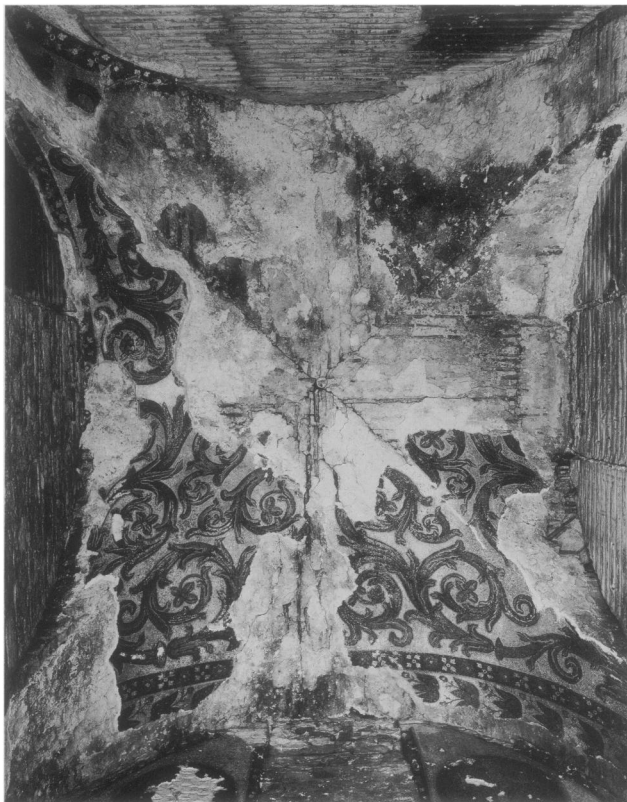
39 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, deer and snake, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



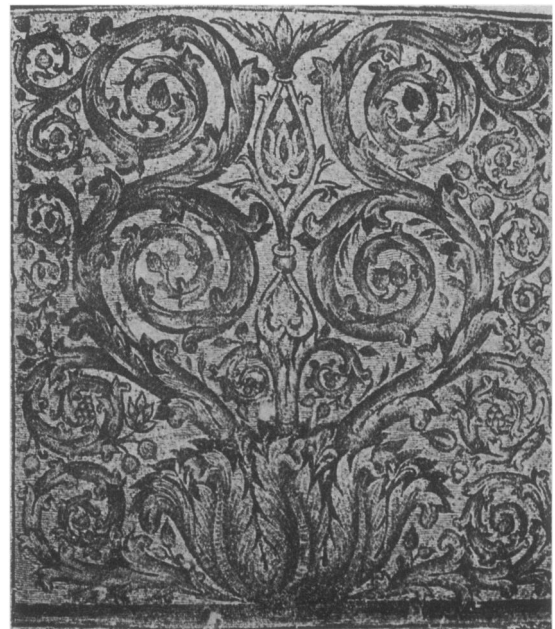
40 Istanbul, mosaic from the Byzantine Imperial Palace, eagle and snake, detail from northeast side (photo: The Walker Trust of St. Andrews University)



41 Silver plate with goatherd, Leningrad, Hermitage Museum (after Banck, *Byzantine Art*)



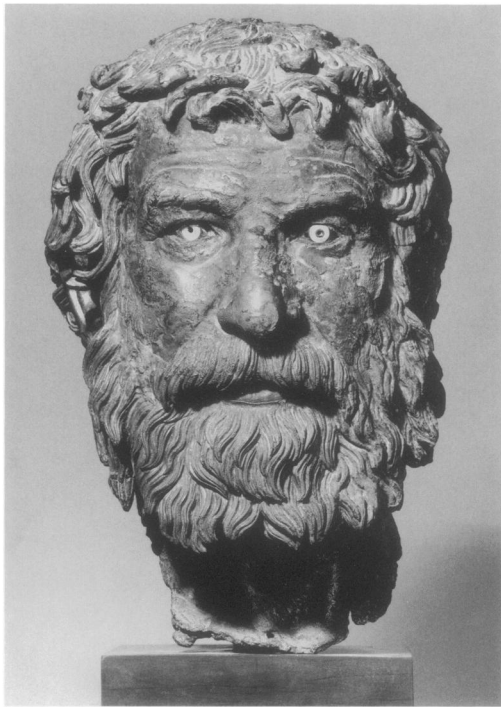
42 Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, scroll mosaic from room over the ramp (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



43 Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock, scroll mosaic (after Creswell)



44 Zliten, Villa of Dar Buc Ammera, inhabited scroll mosaic (photo: German Archaeological Institute, Rome)



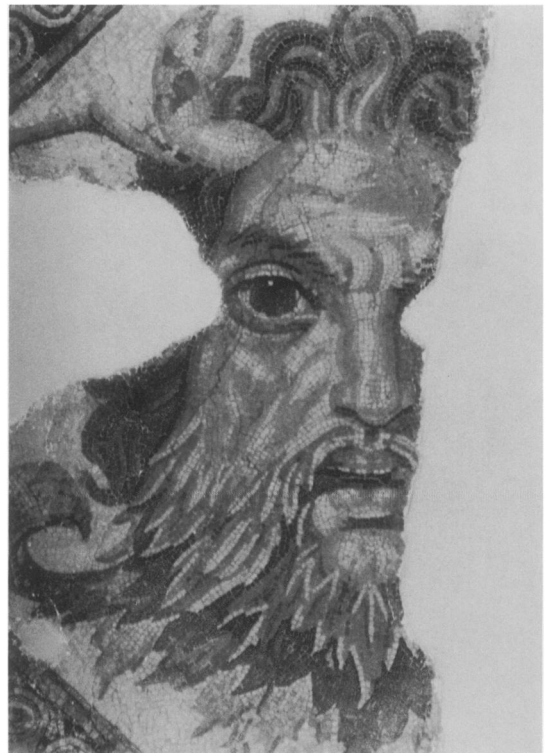
**45 Bronze head from Antikythera. Athens, National Museum
(photo: Hirmer Fotoarchiv)**



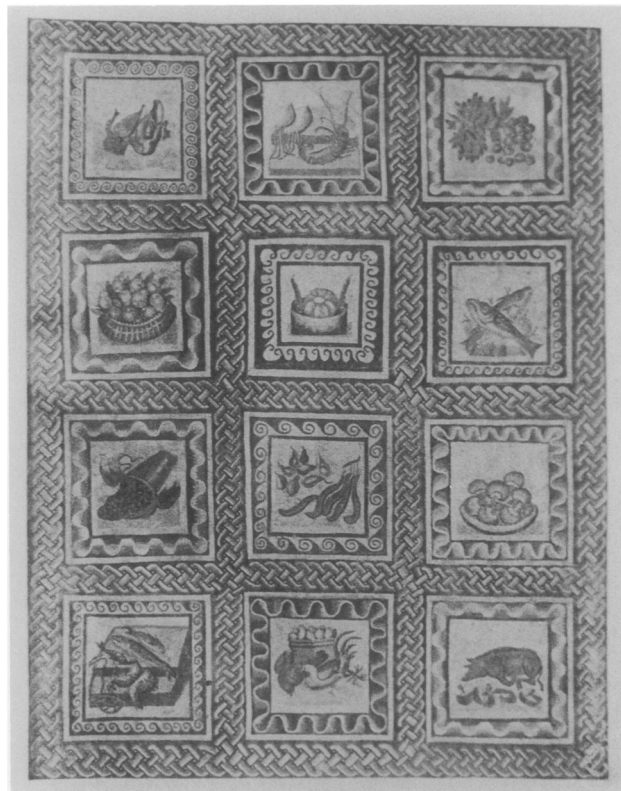
**46 Antioch, Constantinian Villa, head from inhabited scroll mosaic. Paris, Louvre
(photo: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)**



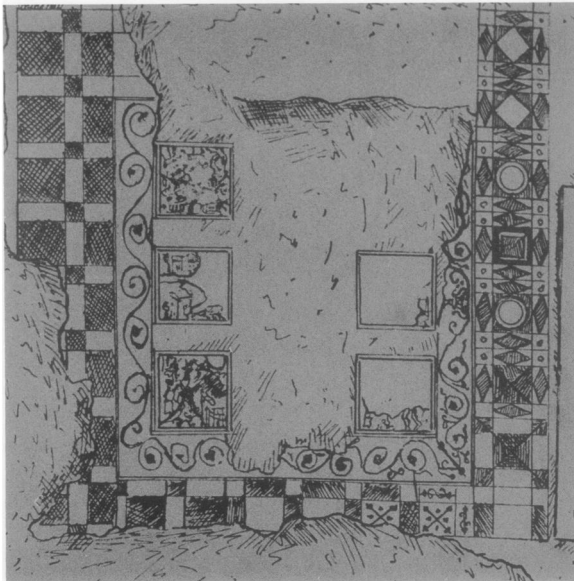
47 Shahba-Philippopolis, head from inhabited scroll mosaic. Souweida, museum (after Balty)



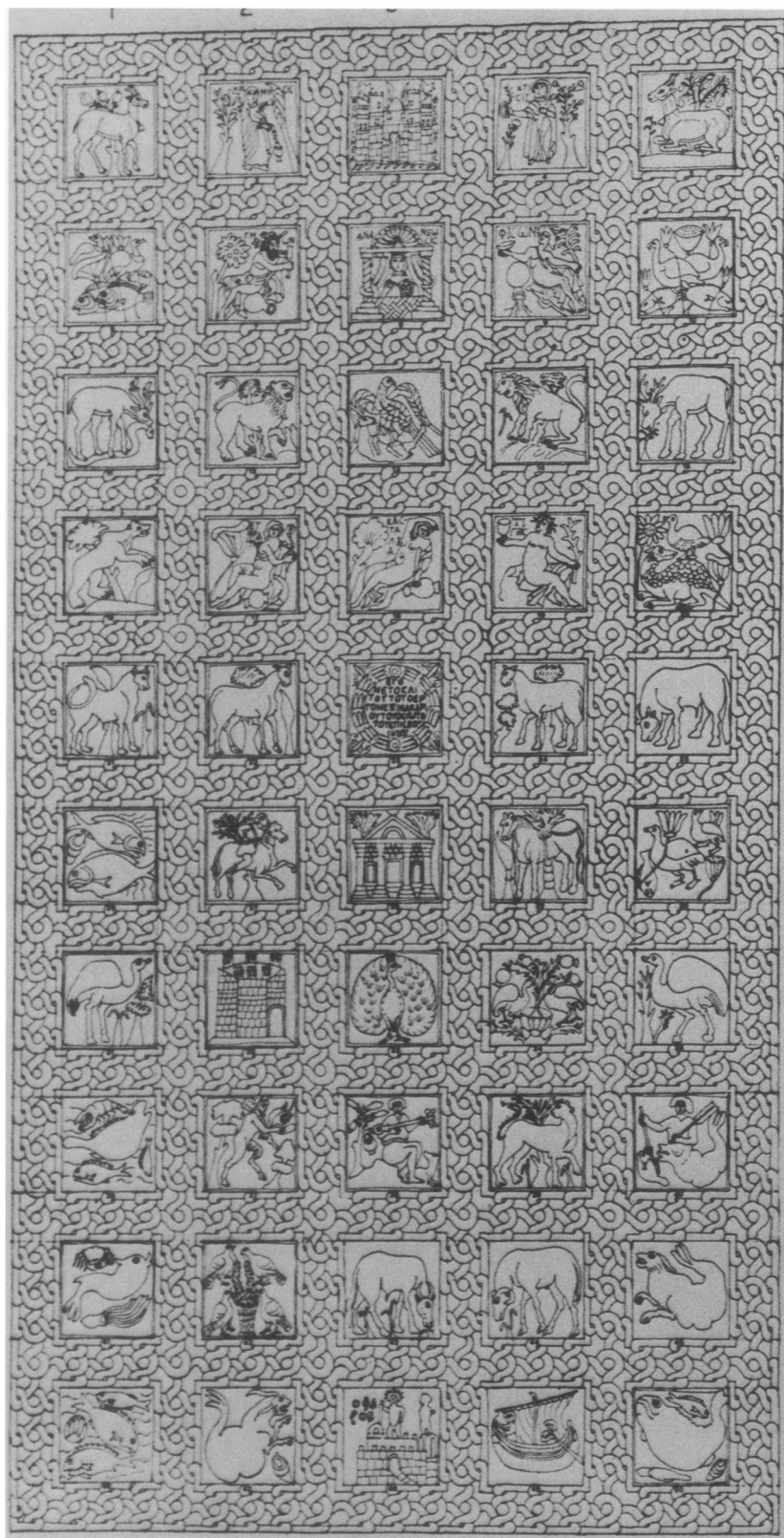
48 Sidi el-Hani, mosaic head of Oceanus. Tunis, Bardo National Museum



49 Rome, floor mosaic with foodstuffs. Vatican Museum (after Nogara)



50 Zliten, Villa of Dar Buc Ammera, mosaic with rural scenes (after Aurigemma)



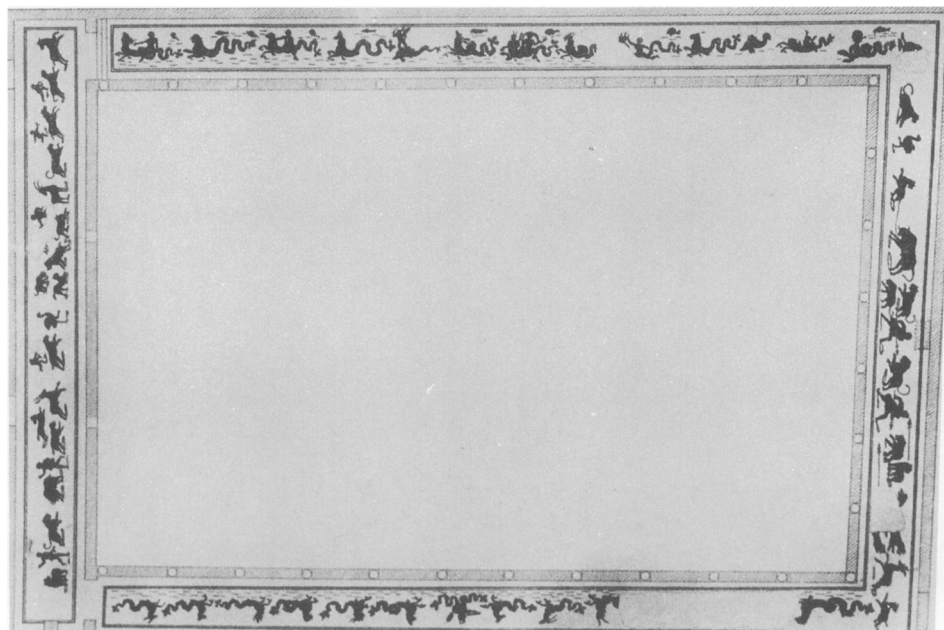
51 Gasr el-Lebia, mosaic floor of the basilica (after Guarducci)



52 Palestrina, Nile mosaic from the shrine of Fortuna. Palestrina, museum



53 El Alia, Nile mosaic (after Lavin)



54 Castel Porziano, mosaic of marine *thiasoi* and *venationes* (after Lavin)



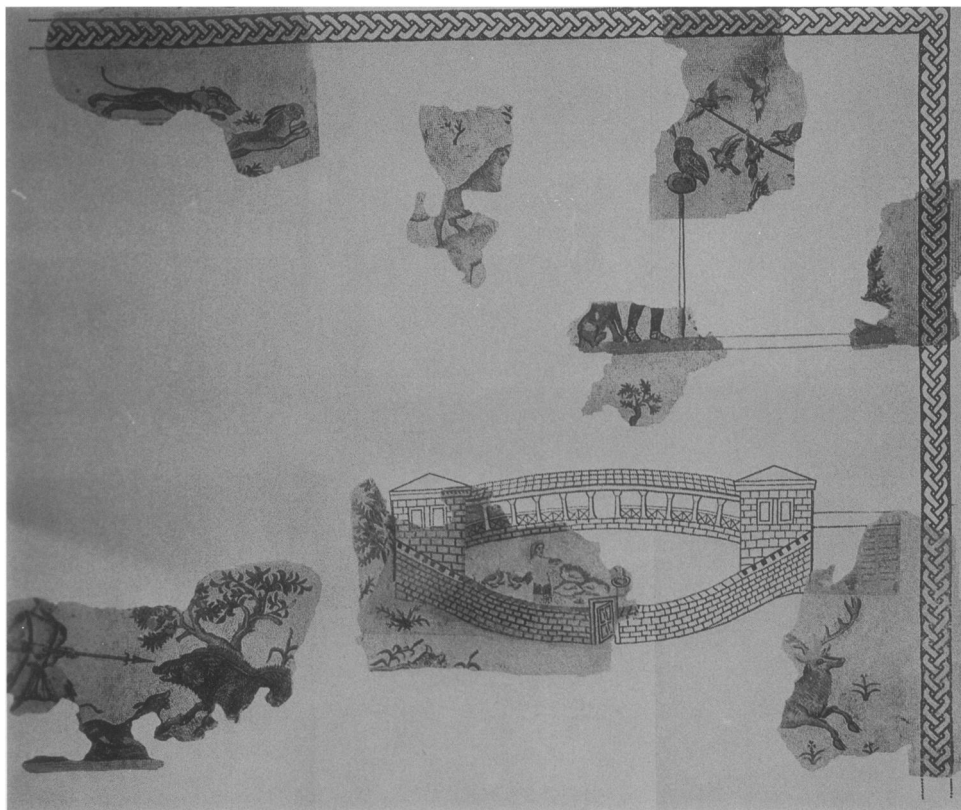
55 Uthina, Villa of the Laberii, mosaic with rural scenes (after Gauckler)



56 Carthage, Villa of Dominus Julius, mosaic with rural scenes. Tunis, Bardo National Museum



57 Constantine, mosaic with hunting scenes (after Lavin)



58 Oderzo, mosaic with rural scenes (after Bertacchi)



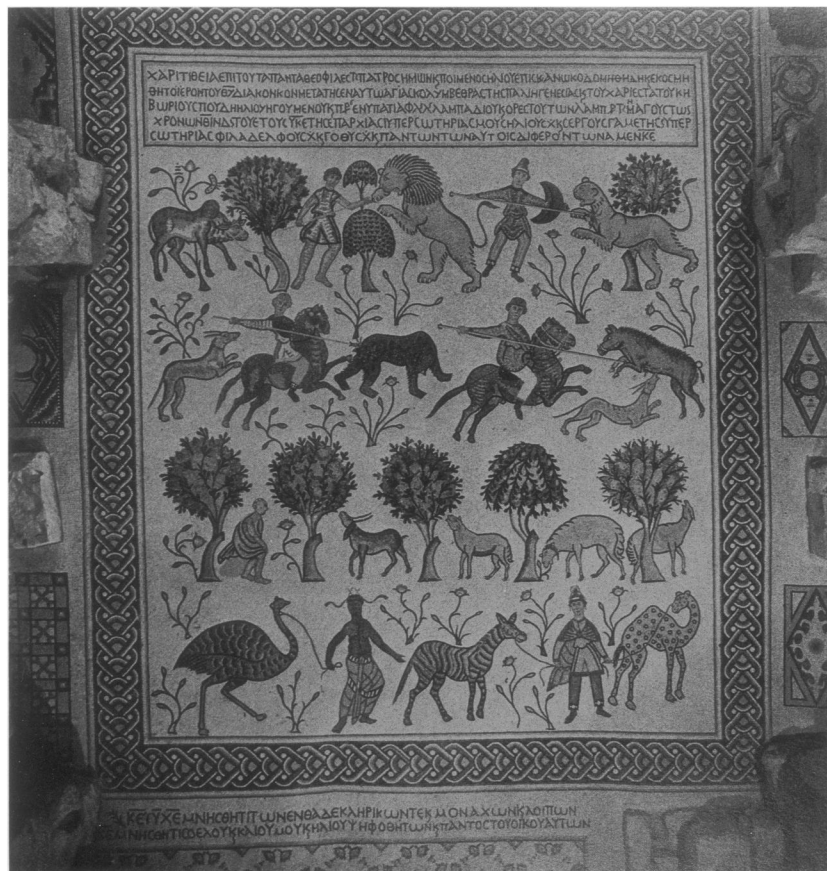
59 Antioch, Hall of *Philia*, mosaic with confronted animals
(photo: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)



60 Antioch, Yakto complex, mosaic with hunting scenes
(the *Megalopsychia* Hunt) (after Levi)



61 Antioch, Martyrium of Seleucia, mosaic with animals
(photo: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University)



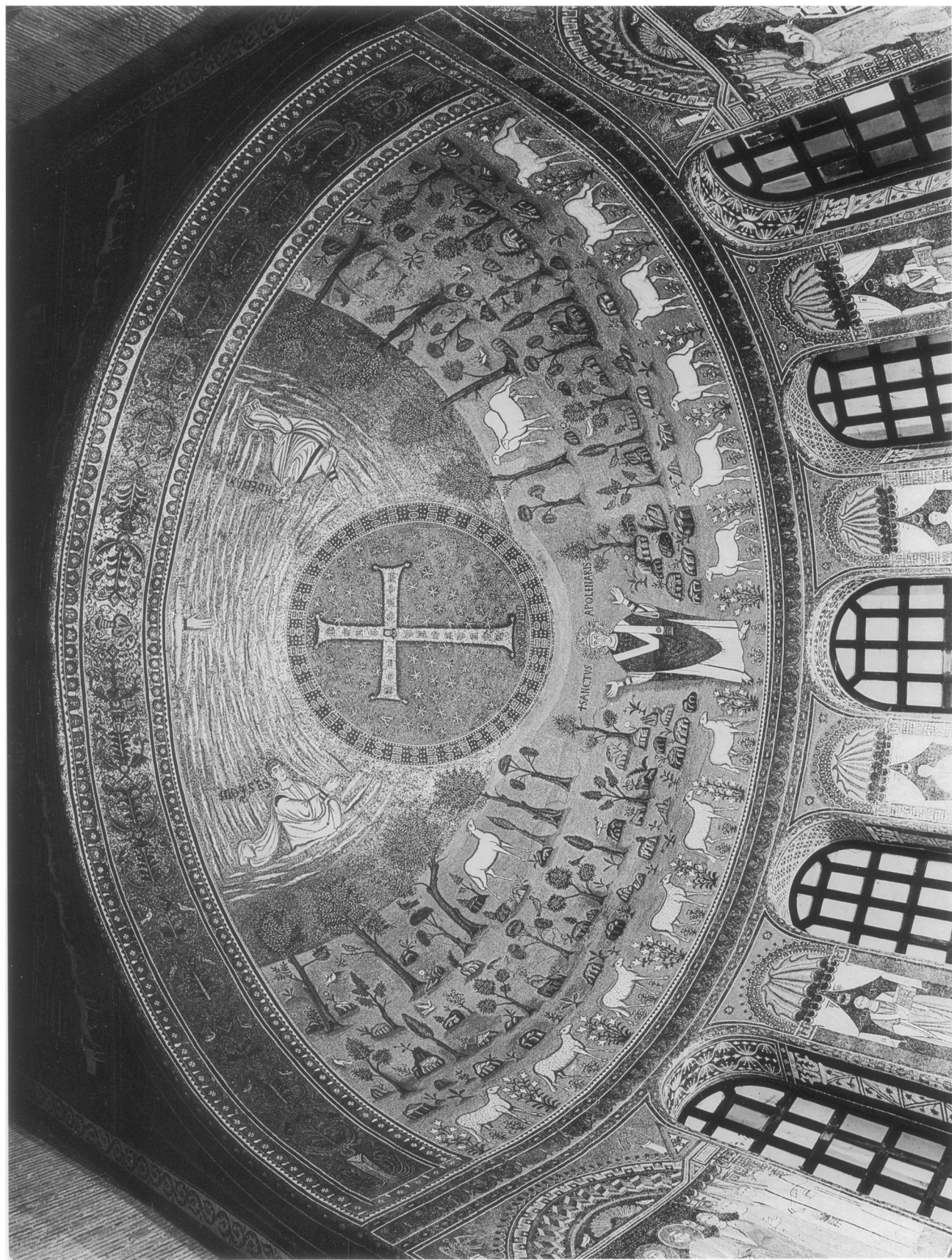
62 Mount Nebo, mosaic floor of baptistry (after Piccirillo)



63 Carthage, mosaic with reclining female figure (after Fink)



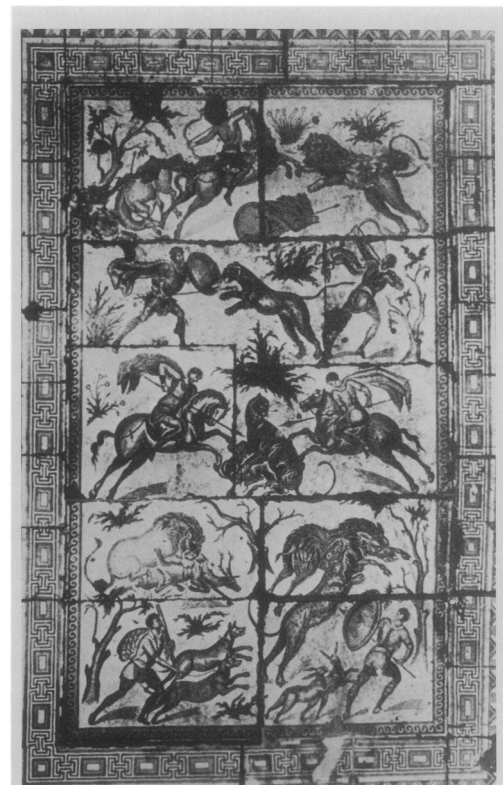
64 Rome, SS. Cosma e Damiano, apse mosaic (photo: Anderson)



65 Ravenna, S. Apollinare in Classe, apse mosaic (photo: German Archaeological Institute, Rome)



66 Ivory plaque with archangel, London, British Museum (reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



67 Apamea, Villa of the *triclinos*, mosaic with hunting scenes. Brussels, Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire (after Balty)



68 Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine, apse mosaic (reproduced by courtesy of the Princeton-Michigan-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)



69 Rome, S. Agnese, apse mosaic (photo: Anderson)



70 Silver plate with maenad and Silenus, Leningrad, Hermitage Museum (after Banck, *Byzantine Art*)



71 Silver plate with David and Goliath, New York, Metropolitan Museum (photo: same)



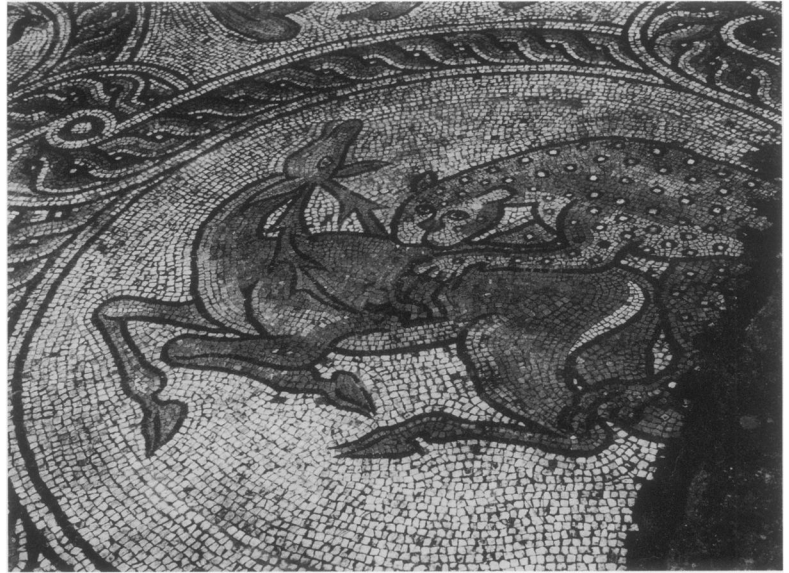
72 Icon of St. Peter, Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine (reproduced by courtesy of the Princeton-Michigan-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)



73 Dougga, mosaic with cyclopes. Tunis, Bardo National Museum



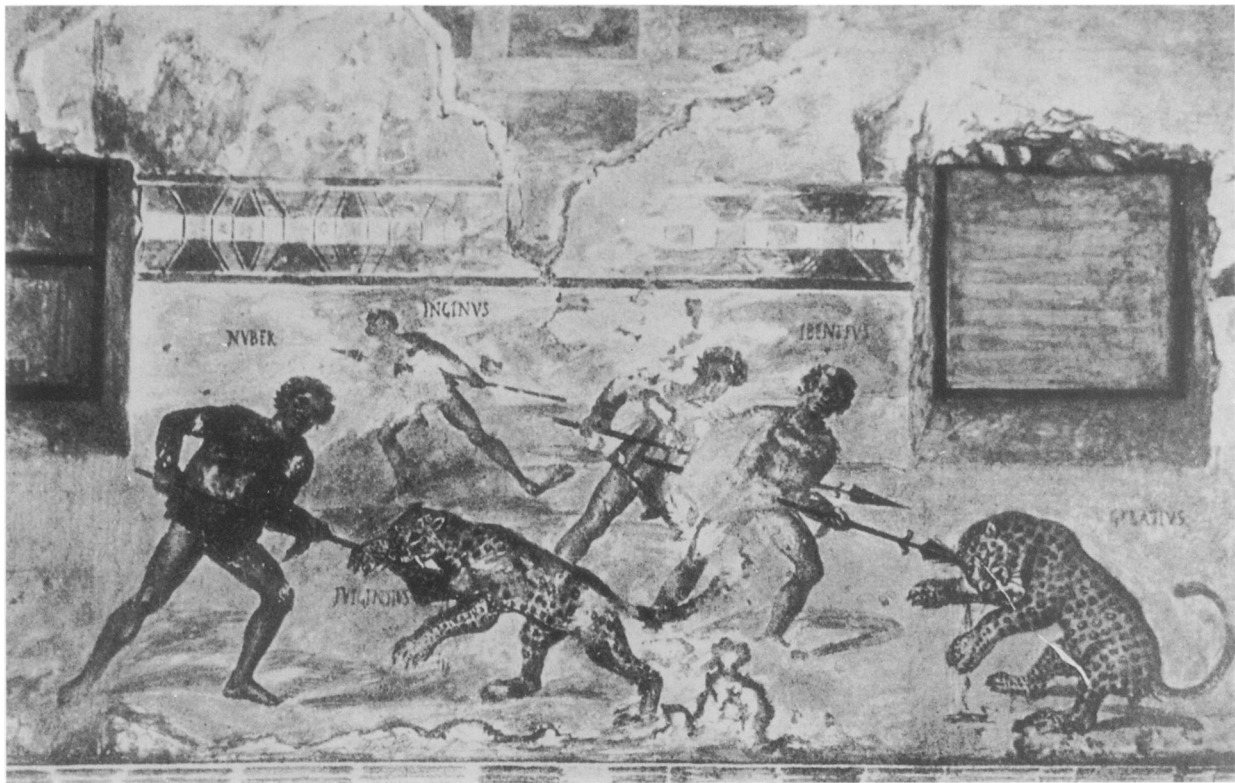
74 Rome, SS. Cosma e Damiano, apse mosaic, detail, St. Peter (photo: Soprintendenza ai monumenti, Rome)



75 Delphi, basilica, mosaic of leopard and deer



76 Thessaloniki, St. Demetrius, mosaic of St. Demetrius and donors (photo: Hirmer Fotoarchiv)



77 Leptis Magna, hunting baths, wall painting of spearmen and leopards (after Borda, *La pittura romana*)



78 Leptis Magna, Villa of the Nile mosaic, mosaic with fishermen (after Aurigemma)

seventy-five scenes or fragments of scenes are arranged in four horizontal registers, oriented to be seen from the inner edge of the peristyle.²⁸ The system of registers is the only formal structuring device in the field, and it is used flexibly, with several of the scenes occupying more than one register. The scenes have the character of vignettes. There are no frames or other obvious separating devices: trees sometimes mark the boundaries between scenes, but more often they are simply parts of the scenes themselves. Nevertheless, the imagery is clearly discontinuous. Adjacent scenes are unrelated in theme and sometimes in scale. There is no unified landscape background or other indication that the figures occupy the same physical space within the pictorial world of the mosaic. The elements of landscape serve only to define distinct environments. They are usually rudimentary, and often omitted.

The stylistic complexities of the Palace mosaic make conventional methods of analysis and dating unusually difficult to apply. The problem lies in identifying the style of the mosaic itself, as distinct from those of the sources which it incorporates. This could be said of any eclectic work, but the Palace mosaic is not just eclectic, it is anthological. Its apparent diversity conceals an intricate thematic structure, but it is nonetheless based on images many of which have no intrinsic or traditional relation to one another. Since an anthology is by definition retrospective, the question inevitably arises: to what extent do the various images in the Palace mosaic reflect the period of their final redaction, that is, that of the mosaic itself, and to what extent

do they preserve the style of an earlier period or periods?

In theory, it is possible that all, or virtually all of the scenes reflect various stages of Roman and even Hellenistic art. By analyzing them separately, we should be able to identify and date the models on which the mosaic is based, as Anthony Cutler suggests in his article on the elephants in the Palace mosaic. This emphasis on diversity is unlikely to help in dating the mosaic, but it raises important questions about the resources of Byzantine culture and the ways in which these resources were used. When we recall the number of scenes which the Palace mosaic must originally have included, and the number which must have been considered for inclusion but rejected as unsuitable,²⁹ it is clear that the mosaic's designer had access to an enormous collection of classically based imagery. Where did it come from? The most obvious answer is that it came from model books in the possession of mosaic workshops. Such model books undoubtedly existed,³⁰ but a repertory of familiar images, intended for translation into mosaic, should have left some trace among other surviving works. Although many of the *subjects* which appear in the Palace mosaic are recognizably conventional, for the most part the images themselves are not. Close visual parallels, when they exist, are with much older works. This is not surprising, since model books reflect the works which their compilers had studied and copied. But one would expect them to reflect more recent works as well, and to leave their own reflection in mosaics of their own time. The relative originality of the Palace mosaic's imagery, vis-à-vis the large number of surviving Early Byzantine mosaics, is strong evidence that current workshop model books were not among the designer's main sources.

Instead, we may posit a group of images assembled by a wealthy and enthusiastic patron, either for his own pleasure or as a deliberate step

illustrated in pl. 4E of the *Second Report* is obviously unfinished, it belongs to a specific type, known from several examples in S. Marco in Venice; cf. F. W. Deichmann, J. Kramer, and Urs Peschlow, *Corpus der Kapitelle der Kirche von San Marco zu Venedig* (Wiesbaden, 1981), pl. 7. The Venice capitals probably date from the 11th century, and I have been unable to find earlier examples outside the Palace, but the comparison should remove all doubt that it is at least theoretically possible to give a terminus post quem for the Palace capitals on stylistic grounds.

²⁸In Appendix 1, I have listed the scenes according to subject matter. I have numbered each scene sequentially, and a second number corresponds to the plate in the *First* or *Second Report* where it appears. All the scenes or details discussed in the text, whether illustrated or not, are identified by their sequential numbers, allowing quick reference to the complete photographic record. This numbering is for convenience only, and does not imply any form of intrinsic sequence. Also, both the total number of scenes and the number in each subgroup are approximations, since the fragmentary state of the mosaic sometimes precludes positive identification. Even where the mosaic survives intact, it is not always easy to decide which figures belong to a given scene.

²⁹For the restrictions which the mosaic's symbolic structure placed on its subject matter, see below, p. 68.

³⁰In his article "Les mosaïstes antiques avaient-ils des cahiers de modèles?" (*RA* [1984] 2, pp. 241-72), Philippe Bruneau argues that ancient mosaic artists did not use model books, but by model books he means collections of stock images circulated from workshop to workshop to be copied at will, not collections of drawings assembled by artists for their own use. In practice the distinction cannot have been absolute. Their function was the same, the only real difference is between "public" and "private" use, and even this would have become blurred by the copying and assimilation of other artists' work, and by the collections themselves changing hands as artists died or migrated.

in the creation of the Palace mosaic.³¹ This would not be the only instance from Early Byzantine history of a collection (in the most general sense) seen not as an end in itself but as a means to some more complex expression. In the fifth century, Lausus, chamberlain to Theodosius II, amassed a remarkable collection of antique sculpture. On the basis of surviving descriptions, Sarah Bassett Clucas has argued that Lausus did not regard it as an assemblage of self-sufficient works, but arranged it to convey the idea of art as a balance between nature and artifice, and of the history of art as a progression "from abstraction to idealized naturalism."³² The new "work" which Lausus created was an intellectual construct only, but the interpretative techniques on which it relied correspond closely to those which underlie the Palace mosaic.

The collection on which the Palace mosaic is based could have included actual Greco-Roman antiquities, and almost certainly included drawings of them, but suitable themes and styles were current in Early Byzantine art itself. For example, silver plates of the type discussed later in this chapter, especially the goatherd plate (Fig. 41) and a plate in Berlin depicting a shepherdess,³³ suggest a flourishing classical-idyllic tradition now almost completely lost. A set of four wool tapestry roundels in the Brooklyn Museum extends the repertory of idyllic scenes, and the close resemblance between the shepherdess with a child on her back in the Berlin plate and in one of the Brooklyn roundels is a reminder that image-types were not confined to single media.³⁴ No scene in either the plates or the tapestries corresponds directly to an extant part of the Palace mosaic, but the very strong generic similarity suggests some possible sources for the mosaic's imagery.

The inhabited scroll of the main border (Figs. 4-11 and Color pl. A) illustrates in microcosm the complexity of the mosaic's origin, and the difficulty of identifying the mosaic's style with a particular period. For the combination of richness and a certain mechanical stiffness which characterizes the

rinceau, the most telling analogues are plain (uninhabited) scroll mosaics from Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Fig. 42) and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Fig. 43). The Jerusalem mosaic, essentially Byzantine in character despite its Muslim setting, dates from 691.³⁵ Both Nordhagen and Wright use it as evidence for a late seventh-century date for the Palace mosaic. It would be very strong evidence indeed, except that the Hagia Sophia mosaic, which Kitzinger attributed only to "the latter half of the sixth or the seventh century," has been shown to date from the years 565-577: well over a century before the Jerusalem mosaic!³⁶ In other words, although the two works are so similar in style that it is unrealistic to associate the Palace mosaic with one but not the other, they date from near the beginning and from the very end of the period to which the Palace mosaic has been ascribed. The remarkable similarity of the three works makes it clear that the style of the rinceau is not in itself a reliable criterion for precise dating of the Palace mosaic.

The rinceau does, however, provide a clue to the mosaic's regional and historical affiliations. Mosaics of the fifth and sixth centuries attest to the popularity of the inhabited scroll throughout the Byzantine world, and the *general* affinity of the Palace scroll to this larger tradition is not in question.³⁷ More specific correspondences, however, are almost completely lacking.³⁸ But while the Palace rinceau appears to be almost without direct antecedents among Early Byzantine mosaics, it bears

³⁵ H. Stern, "Notes sur les mosaïques du Dôme du Rocher et de la Mosquée de Damas à propos d'un livre de Mme. M.G. van Berchem," *CahArch* 22 (1972), 201-32.

³⁶ Kitzinger, "Byzantine Art in the Period Between Justinian and Iconoclasm," 11; for the 6th-century date see R. Cormack and E. J. W. Hawkins, "Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: The Rooms above the Southwest Vestibule and Ramp," *DOP* 31 (1977), 177-251, esp. 202-10. Cormack and Hawkins accept an early Justinianic date for the Palace mosaic, which plays an important but not a crucial part in their argument (pp. 209-10). Wright, however, attributes the Hagia Sophia rinceau, like the Palace mosaic, to the reign of Justinian II ("The Shape of the Seventh Century in Byzantine Art," 25).

³⁷ For an inventory of these mosaics, and a discussion of some of the problems of style and transmission associated with the theme, see C. Dauphin, "Byzantine Pattern Books: A Re-examination of the Problem in the Light of the 'Inhabited Scroll,'" *Art History* 1 (1978), 400-423.

³⁸ There is little doubt that the Hagia Sophia and Jerusalem mosaics, together with the Palace mosaic, represent a specifically Constantinopolitan tradition of foliate ornament (Stern, "Notes sur les mosaïques du Dôme du Rocher"). The treatment of the acanthus leaves finds an intriguing parallel in the very fine mosaic of Atalante and Meleager, datable around 475, from Apamea in Syria, but the overall character of the ornament is very different (C. Dulière, "Ateliers de mosaïstes de la

³¹ For the background, character, and motives of such a patron, see below, pp. 66-68.

³² S. B. Clucas, "The Collection of Statuary in the Palace of Lausus," paper read at the 17th International Byzantine Congress, Washington, D.C., 1986; see their *Abstracts of Short Papers*, 67-68. On the history of antique sculpture in Constantinople, see C. Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *DOP* 17 (1963), 55-75, esp. 58.

³³ *Age of Spirituality*, no. 231.

³⁴ *Age of Spirituality*, nos. 227-30; G. Brett, "The Brooklyn Textiles and the Great Palace Mosaic," *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum* (Boston, 1950), 433-41.

remarkable resemblance to a work from a very different context. This is a mosaic of the second century A.D. from the so-called Villa of Dar Buc Ammera near Zliten in Libya (Fig. 44).³⁹ The correspondence between the two works is by no means exact. Nevertheless, in the balance between ornamental and naturalistic emphasis, and the fanciful distribution of additional plant and animal motifs throughout the scroll, the Zliten mosaic provides by far the closest single parallel to the general conception and treatment of the inhabited scroll in the Palace mosaic. How are we to account for the kinship between two works so far separated in both time and space? It might be argued that the Palace mosaic merely reproduces certain Hellenistic features of much earlier rinceaux, features which the Zliten mosaic also happens to preserve.⁴⁰ But if the traits in question were definable in terms of Hellenism alone, we should find them in the inhabited scroll mosaics of the Greek East, which are derived from the Hellenistic tradition. Since this is not the case, we must either posit a body of work in the Greek East which no longer survives, but which decisively influenced the development of the Palace rinceau, or else assume—and explain—a more or less direct link between Roman North Africa and Byzantine Constantinople.

Before exploring the problem in greater detail, however, we should consider what other evidence the border of the Palace mosaic provides for its historical and regional origins. The most striking feature of the border are the human faces which, at intervals, occupy virtually its full breadth. Four such faces survive; three are complete or nearly so, one is fragmentary. All represent an extremely high level of technical and artistic accomplishment, but they differ greatly in character. The

head shown in Figure 9 has attracted far more attention than the other three, not because it is superior technically but because of the vivid individuality of its features. Talbot Rice implies that it is derived from naturalistic representations of barbarians, though he stops short of calling it a portrait.⁴¹ While the face is undeniably impressive, its "individuality" may be largely conventional. The underlying conception is organic, but the exaggeration of the features (a matter not of size but of emphasis) points to a stylistic rather than a racial type as the primary model; the Hellenistic bronze head from Antikythera, in the National Museum in Athens (Fig. 45), comes to mind.⁴² Two other faces (Figs. 10 and 11) appear to come from the tradition of inhabited scroll mosaics of fourth-century Syria, as represented by the Constantinian Villa at Antioch (Fig. 46) and the later part of the mosaic from Shahba-Philippopolis (Fig. 47).⁴³ The fourth (Color pl. A) derives from a tradition of masks representing Oceanus.⁴⁴ Such masks are common in floor mosaics, but in the Western rather than the Eastern Empire, and in marine compositions rather than inhabited scrolls.⁴⁵ Despite its unusual setting, and despite the fact that the specifically marine attributes usually associated with Oceanus are minimized (hair and beard transformed into seaweed) or eliminated (crab claws growing from the forehead), the Palace head belongs to the same genre. The closest parallels are from Roman North Africa, above all a mosaic

⁴¹ *First Report*, 130.

⁴² M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age* (New York, 1961), 164. The head dates from the 2nd century B.C.

⁴³ D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Princeton, 1947), 226 ff; Balty, *Mosaïques antiques de Syrie*, no. 7. For faces of similar type from Greece, ca. 500, see G. Åkerström-Hougen, *The Calendar and Hunting Mosaics of the Villa of the Falconer in Argos* (Stockholm, 1974), pl. iii.

⁴⁴ Talbot Rice refers to "two bearded heads representing Oceanus" discovered before the Second World War and published in the *First Report* (*Second Report*, 130). It is unclear how he arrived at the conclusion that both Fig. 10 and Color pl. A represent Oceanus. He also ignores Fig. 11, similarly published in the *First Report*, which clearly belongs to the same type as Fig. 10, not to the Oceanus type represented by Color pl. A. The head shown in Fig. 9 was discovered by Talbot Rice after the war, and published in the *Second Report*.

⁴⁵ An exception on both counts is the Orpheus mosaic from Jerusalem, now in Istanbul. See B. Bagatti, "Il mosaico dell' Orfeo a Gerusalemme," *RACr* 28 (1952), 145–60; A. Ovadia and S. Mucznik, "Orpheus from Jerusalem—Pagan or Christian Image?" *Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981), 152–66. It has an inhabited scroll border with masks of the Oceanus type at two corners. Although both the general image type and its use in a border correspond to the Palace mosaic, the level of skill is so much lower that it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to the relation, if any, between the two works.

seconde moitié du Ve siècle," *Actes du Colloque Apamée de Syrie, Fouilles d'Apamée de Syrie. Miscellanea*, fasc. 6 [Brussels, 1969], 125–28; J. Balty, *Mosaïques antiques de Syrie* [Brussels, 1977], nos. 54–56). Even this incomplete analogy is exceptional; the eastern Mediterranean affords no other glimpse of a local tradition which could be construed as a direct reflection of, or influence on, the ornamental style of the Palace mosaic. The rinceau from the church of St. John at Jerash could perhaps be regarded as a distant relative of the Palace mosaic border, for the relation of the volutes to the subjects they enclose (C. F. Kraeling, ed., *Gerash, City of the Decapolis* [New Haven, 1938], 324–29 and pls. LXVIII–LXIX; the mosaics are dated between 529 and 533). At this point, however, the kinship becomes so tenuous as to be for all practical purposes meaningless.

³⁹ S. Aurigemma, *I mosaici di Zliten* (Rome-Milan, 1926).

⁴⁰ For the Hellenistic inhabited scroll tradition, see J. M. C. Toynbee and J. Ward-Perkins, "Peopled Scrolls: A Hellenistic Motif in Imperial Art," *PBSR* 18 (1950), 1–43.

of the second century from Sidi el-Hani, now in the Bardo Museum in Tunis, which the Palace head resembles not only in type but also, to a remarkable extent, in style (Fig. 48).⁴⁶

Comparisons such as these reveal the diversity of regional and period styles on which the Palace mosaic draws. To pinpoint when the varied sources came together in a single work, a different kind of analysis is needed. By any Late Antique or Byzantine standard, the Palace mosaic is deeply and avowedly retrospective. But classicism, in the sense of the perpetuation of styles and themes associated with much earlier periods of Greco-Roman culture, is not in itself sufficient evidence for any specific date. The most reliable stylistic criteria are precisely those which can be separated from the overwhelming general sense of classicism which the mosaic conveys. I shall focus in succession on three defining aspects of the mosaic's style: large-scale surface *composition*, the representation of *space*, and *style on the level of detail*, including such elements as highlighting and the treatment of drapery. This approach carries some risk of abstraction, of losing touch with the mosaic as a whole. However, without an established date for the mosaic, any attempt to see it as a whole is self-deceiving and self-defeating. No agreement on the date—nor, for that matter, any deeper understanding of the mosaic's character—is possible unless we put aside stylistic generalities and concentrate, if only temporarily, on the specific.

Each aspect of the Palace mosaic's style has its own history, which I shall explore with particular attention to mosaics, but with some reference to other arts as well. Since this part of my study is intended mainly to establish the Palace mosaic's date, there is no need to pursue each aspect through the entire development from Roman to Byzantine art. Archaeological evidence assures us that the mosaic cannot be earlier than the sixth century. However, in discussing the composition I have taken the search for the mosaic's forbears as far back as the second century, and in one case even earlier. In part, this is to make sure that stylistic and archaeological evidence are not in conflict, and we shall see that they are not. But there are other reasons as well. Composition is the most

obvious unifying feature of any complex pictorial work. In a work as big and complex as the Palace mosaic, it is so obvious as to be taken for granted. Yet of all the aspects into which such a work may be resolved, composition is the one most likely to reflect the conception of a single artist. Since here, if anywhere, we may see the mind of the mosaic's designer at work, it is essential that we know what sources he had at his command. Only in this way is it possible to understand the Palace mosaic's particular balance between convention and innovation. What is more, the fact that the Palace mosaic's composition belongs to a tradition going back many centuries illustrates the continuity of Greco-Roman art in a very different way from the generalities of figural naturalism. We should not underestimate the possibility that compositional types were, as much as figural types, an effective way of deliberately evoking the art of earlier periods. As we shall see, the possibility is especially important in view of the Palace mosaic's relation to earlier North African mosaics, and Heraclius' own North African background.

Throughout their history, Roman floor mosaics show a strong predilection for compositions incorporating numbers of separate images. We must remember, however, that the devices that separate also connect; the devices that connect also separate. This happens so frequently that it should be regarded as a basic principle of Roman and Byzantine decorative composition.⁴⁷ The formal devices used for this purpose vary almost as much as the content of the images themselves, but there are two main lines of development which together account for the composition of the Palace mosaic. Although both have their origin in the same predilection, they reflect it on very different levels. In the first, especially common in floor mosaics, images are enclosed in frames, and the frames are organized into larger, easily recognizable patterns. Whether one concentrates on the overall arrangement, or on the individual framed images, neither point of view ever completely eclipses the other. The patterns used to integrate the frames may be quite complex, but one of the commonest and longest-lived consists simply of square frames arranged in rows to form a grid. This arrangement has been shown to derive from the decoration of coffered ceilings,⁴⁸ but while ceiling coffers were

⁴⁶ Bardo Museum, inv. no. A 13. For other examples of the genre, see L. Foucher, *Thermes romains aux environs d'Hadrumète* (Tunis, 1958), pl. 9; S. Aurigemma, *Italy in Africa: Archaeological Discoveries (1911–1943)*. Tripolitania. vol. I—*Monuments of Decorative Art. Part I: Mosaics* (Rome, 1960), pl. v.

⁴⁷ J. Trilling, *The Medallion Style: A Study in the Origins of Byzantine Taste* (New York, 1985).

⁴⁸ M. L. Morriconi Matini, "Mosaici romani a cassettoni del I° secolo avanti Cristo," *ArchCl* 17 (1965), 75–91; H. Stern, "La

traditionally non-figural, floor mosaics derived from them quickly came to include elaborate representational imagery (Fig. 49).⁴⁹ It is not uncommon to find entire scenes framed and associated in this way.

The *emblema*, a legacy of the Hellenistic period, helps explain this convention. Strictly speaking, an *emblema* is a pictorial mosaic composition, usually small and finely worked, which is made separately and set into a mosaic pavement, providing its main visual focus. In practice, the term is used more freely, to denote almost any small-scale composition set off from the rest of the pavement by a frame, and often standing out by virtue of its detailed and illusionistic character. In this sense it is applicable to much of Roman and Late Antique art, while implying a lasting if increasingly tenuous connection with the mosaic “paintings” of the Hellenistic era.⁵⁰

There is a seeming paradox in connecting the *emblema*, the isolated image par excellence, with a tendency to multiply images and combine them into patterns. Nonetheless, these two currents in Roman mosaic composition do run together. As Katherine Dunbabin points out, “When it is desired to decorate more of the floor than a small panel at its center, the number of such pictures is simply multiplied.”⁵¹ One of the oldest surviving works to combine the linked-frame and *emblema* traditions is a mosaic of the second or third century A.D. from Zliten (Fig. 50), with square panels (three now remain of the original nine) enclosing scenes of farm life.⁵² The longevity of this compositional type, and its potential for expansion and complexity, is illustrated by a mosaic of 539–540 from the nave of a basilica at Gasr el-Lebia in Libya (Fig. 51).⁵³ In a restricted but important sense, Gasr el-Lebia is probably the closest surviving antecedent of the Palace mosaic: it shows the possibility of coordinating large numbers of images

whose subjects are neither physically nor temporally connected. There is, however, a symbolic connection; André Grabar has argued that the mosaic as a whole represents the world governed by God, while Henry Maguire shows that it is not only a depiction of the world but an elaborate allegory combining theology and imperial politics.⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that Maguire explicitly connects the grid structure with the ability to convey multiple meanings: “The mosaic cannot be read as if it had a linear program, with a single sequence of ideas following in a logical progression one after another.”⁵⁵ Even without a framing system, we shall see that the same principle underlies the symbolic reading of the Palace mosaic.

The main compositional difference between Gasr el-Lebia and the Palace mosaic is that in the former the individual images are enclosed by a rigid system of frames, while in the latter they are unconfined, appearing as vignettes against a plain background. It is possible that an artist who was familiar only with frames and *emblemata* was inspired to do away with the frames and allow the *emblemata* to expand with little or no formal regulation, but it is unnecessary to postulate such a step. *Unframed* compositions of the same general type—we may call them episodic compositions—are attested in Roman mosaic art as early as the first century B.C., in the pavement from the shrine of Fortuna at Palestrina (Praeneste) outside Rome (Fig. 52).⁵⁶ Their subsequent development is as well documented as the use of multiple frames, and provides the other part of the Palace mosaic’s compositional lineage. The Palestrina mosaic is much damaged and restored, but its overall composition is not in doubt. Ostensibly it is a schematic but continuous panorama of the life and landscape of Egypt, from the Nile delta to the highlands of Ethiopia. On closer examination it proves to have a number of focal points, usually buildings but

funzione del mosaico nella casa antica,” *Antichità altoadriatiche* 8 (1975), 39–57.

⁴⁹ Trilling, *Medallion Style*, 32.

⁵⁰ Lavin, “The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch,” 185–87; Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 50–52, 90–91.

⁵¹ Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (Oxford, 1978), 4.

⁵² This is the same site as the inhabited scroll of Fig. 44 but its mosaics are not all contemporaneous. See Aurigemma, *I mosaici di Zliten*; Lavin, “The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch,” 229–31; D. Parrish, “The Date of the Mosaics from Zliten,” *Antiquités africaines* 21 (1985), 137–58.

⁵³ E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum and J. Ward-Perkins, *Justinianic Mosaic Pavements in Cyrenaican Churches* (Rome, 1980).

⁵⁴ A. Grabar, “Recherches sur les sources juives de l’art paléochrétien,” pt. II, *CahArch* 12 (1962), repr. in Grabar, *L’art de la fin de l’antiquité et du moyen âge* (Paris, 1968), II, 763–87, esp. 775 ff; H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park-London, 1987), 41–55. According to Maguire, “the message of the floor is not only the renewal of the town under the emperor’s auspices, but also the allegory of the gathering of the gentiles, their conversion, and their unification into one church” (p. 54). In view of Justinian’s expansionist policies, even the theological side of the allegory is shown to have important political implications.

⁵⁵ Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, 55. On the expressive potential of images linked by a framing system, see also Trilling, *Medallion Style*, 71–74.

⁵⁶ G. Gullini, *I mosaici di Palestrina* (Rome, 1956).

sometimes large animals or groups of people, which stand out from the landscape as virtually self-contained vignettes. Furthermore, the alternating bands of land and water divide the composition into irregular but recognizable horizontal registers. The Palestrina mosaic may thus be read both as a unified landscape and as a collection of individual scenes, linked thematically by their Egyptian setting and formally by devices—registers and vignettes—that already anticipate the Palace mosaic. At Palestrina both registers and vignettes are carefully integrated into the landscape, and thus camouflaged, while in the Palace mosaic they stand out against the plain ground.

Episodic composition seems to have found particular favor in Roman North Africa, where it was used above all for scenes of hunting and of daily life.⁵⁷ A mosaic of the second century from El Alia in Tunisia (Fig. 53) marks an important stage in the evolution toward the Palace mosaic.⁵⁸ Like the mosaic from Palestrina it is a schematic panorama of life on the Nile, but the two compositions could hardly be more different. At Palestrina, land and water are clearly distinguished (allowing for the intermediate category of marshy flooded ground), and their distribution allows the eye to follow the course of the river through a changing landscape. The El Alia mosaic, in sharp contrast, represents an outer rim of dry land, enclosing an area of undifferentiated water and marsh over which are scattered ships, amphibious animals, and human figures either standing or swimming. The demarcation of the two zones is minimal, and although some landscape features are present, the dominant impression is of images distributed over a neutral ground. The lack of a consistent scale among the figures, ships, and other elements of the scene strongly accentuates this impression.

⁵⁷ Other examples include animal catalogues and representations of Orpheus surrounded by beasts; it is interesting how easily these two themes were conflated. On Orpheus mosaics see H. Stern, "La mosaïque d'Orphée de Blanzky-lès-Fismes," *Gallia* 13 (1955), 41–77. For a detailed treatment of the evolution of compositional types in North African mosaics, see Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," and Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*. The present study will consider only those monuments or trends which I believe shed a direct light on the origins of the Palace mosaic.

⁵⁸ P. Gauckler, *Inventaire des mosaïques de la Gaule et de L'Afrique. II: Afrique Proconsulaire (Tunisie)* (Paris, 1910, 1914), nos. 92–93; L. Foucher, "Les mosaïques nilotiques africaines," *La mosaïque gréco-romaine*, Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1963 (Paris, 1965), 135–43; Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 224–26; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 48.

Thus even without a register system, the composition of the El-Alia mosaic matches that of the Palace mosaic to a remarkable degree.

Both the Palestrina and the El Alia mosaics depict schematic but physically unified landscapes; the Palace mosaic does not. A crucial distinguishing feature is the use of a completely plain ground. In this regard a mosaic of the second century from Castel Porziano outside Rome (Fig. 54) seems to anticipate the Palace mosaic remarkably closely.⁵⁹ But while it shares the plain ground and rectangular peristyle format of the later work, the correspondence is by no means complete. Although the figures are *visually* isolated against the ground, *thematically* they are unified in a very obvious way. Each side of the peristyle has only one kind of subject matter, and facing sides depict the same themes: marine *thiasoi* on the long sides, scenes of hunting or the arena on the short ones. It should be noted, however, that the animal combat scenes may be broken down into separate encounters, which need not be read as taking place simultaneously within a defined spatial setting. Thus, despite its simple thematic structure, the Castel Porziano mosaic does presage the system of self-contained vignettes that is the basis of the Palace mosaic.

To understand this development fully, we must keep in mind the Roman tendency to treat images, even very elaborate ones, as units to be manipulated and arranged at will, within the framework of a larger pattern. We have seen how this works for framed images. The treatment of unframed images tends to be looser, less subject to a rigid geometric structure, but it reflects the same basic current of taste. A crucial document for the use of multiple unframed images is a mosaic of the early third century from the Villa of the Laberii at Oudna (Uthina), Tunisia (Fig. 55).⁶⁰ The mosaic depicts scenes of farming and rural life, but how these scenes are meant to be read is open to question. Lavin speaks of the artist "turning the landscape upward at the two short sides," with the implication that the composition represents a single scene.⁶¹ This is possible: the strong ground line which extends around three sides of the panel may

⁵⁹ Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 252. The mosaic is now in the Museo delle Terme.

⁶⁰ P. Gauckler, "Le domaine des Laberii à Uthina," *Monuments Piot* 3 (1896), 177–229; Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 230–31; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 112–13.

⁶¹ Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 230.

indeed have been meant to enclose and define an area within which the various episodes take place. Such a reading assumes that the Uthina mosaic is comparable to the Nile mosaic from El Alia, more schematic but not qualitatively different. Two important features that the Uthina and El Alia mosaics share are inconsistencies of scale (note especially the quail at the bottom of the Uthina mosaic), and multiple viewpoints. It is arguable, however, that the differences between the two works outweigh the similarities, and go beyond the merely quantitative. Whereas in the El Alia mosaic the figures are scattered over a largely undifferentiated surface, at Uthina the ground is completely featureless. The resulting spatial ambiguity is unprecedented. Each scene, whether on the perimeter or in the center of the panel, is anchored to a strong ground-line, but the treatment of the ground (in the sense of background) makes it impossible to see the inner and outer zones of the composition as belonging to a single rationally conceived setting. The disjunction is particularly striking at the top corners, where the two zones meet at right angles: multiple viewpoints and featureless ground provide no clue to their relative placement in the "real" three-dimensional space of a landscape.

The Uthina mosaic may well be the earliest known example of the juxtaposition of self-contained episodes without the use of frames. It thus represents a crucial step toward the Palace mosaic, whose far freer and more elaborate composition depends on the ability to hold a virtually unlimited number of unframed scenes in a kind of stasis against a ground with no unifying spatial or landscape features. This ability is based on both the coalescence of the multiple-frame and *emblema* traditions, culminating (at least as regards the number and variety of scenes) at Gasr el-Lebia, and in the development of multiple unframed images from the panoramas of Palestrina and El Alia to the spatial ambiguity of the Uthina mosaic.

Equally important for the Palace mosaic, and equally based on extensive developments in the Roman world, is the structuring of the composition in registers. There is a suggestion of such structuring in the central part of the Uthina mosaic, but it is rudimentary compared to other contemporary and later examples, such as the third-century farming mosaic from Cherchell, the "Small Hunt" from Piazza Armerina of the early fourth century, and the mosaic of life on a country

estate from the house of Dominus Julius at Carthage (Fig. 56).⁶² Despite the skill with which they combine unframed scenes, these mosaics seem in one important sense to lead away from the Palace mosaic rather than toward it. In the Palace mosaic, registers form only the most basic armature, which the artist has elaborated with such subtlety and restraint that the structure is largely disguised. In contrast, the mosaics which I have just cited rely heavily on ground lines, which rather mechanically separate and emphasize the registers. There is, however, a striking exception to this common practice: a mosaic of the early fourth century from Constantine in Algeria, with hunting and animal combat scenes arranged in registers against a plain background *with no ground lines* (Fig. 57).⁶³ Lavin observes that it "offers the closest parallel of all to the Palace mosaic floor from the point of view of design. . . ."⁶⁴

The Constantine mosaic appears to be unique in North Africa, but a mosaic of the same period from Oderzo in Italy (Fig. 58), provides a tantalizing suggestion that similar aspects of the Palace mosaic were anticipated elsewhere in the Latin West.⁶⁵ Unfortunately it can be no more than a suggestion, since the mosaic is very fragmentary and the recently published reconstruction is conjectural. There appears, however, to be a register system, but a loose one like that of the Palace mosaic, not a rigid one as at Constantine. Ground lines are in use, but they seem not to extend across the entire composition. The scale of the figures is inconsistent, and the ground, while not completely empty, has few landscape elements and cannot be supposed to depict a continuous or rational space. It is possible, therefore, that the Oderzo mosaic represents a combination of the compositional types which we have seen in the mosaics of Uthina and Constantine, and a more fully developed phase of both. If so, it would embody every major compositional feature of the Palace mosaic except those imposed by the shape of the peristyle itself.

⁶²J. Bérard, "Mosaïques inédites de Cherchell," *Mélanges* 52 (1935), 113–42; and R. Bianchi-Bandinelli, *Rome: The Late Empire* (New York, 1971), 252–59 and pls. 234–36; A. Carandini, A. Ricci, and M. de Vos, *Filosofiana: The Villa of Piazza Armerina* (Palermo, 1982); A. Merlin, "La mosaïque du seigneur Julius à Carthage," *BAC* (1921), 95–114. On the general issue of register composition, see Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 226–29.

⁶³Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 236–37.

⁶⁴Review of the *First Report*, 74.

⁶⁵P. L. Zovatto, "Mosaici opitergini con scene all'aria aperta," *Critica d'arte* 4 (1957), 97–107.

Up to this point, the mosaics we have considered as compositional ancestors to the Palace mosaic come exclusively from the Latin West. Beginning with the fifth century, the emphasis shifts decisively to the Greek East. This shift does not imply a sudden break in the development of compositional types; on the contrary, Lavin has shown that the hunting mosaics of fifth-century Antioch are derived from North African models.⁶⁶ However, given the uncertain channels of transmission, and the differing tastes of artists and patrons in widely separated regions, it is not surprising that the eastern developments are more than a simple continuation of the tendencies we have explored so far. The Eastern Mediterranean offers many variations on the theme of figures distributed over a plain ground, with a particular emphasis on unframed imagery. The earliest relevant example is the mosaic from the Hall of Philia at Antioch, which has been dated to the late fourth century (Fig. 59).⁶⁷ The long, narrow framework of the composition instantly suggests the Palace mosaic, but the composition itself is very different. Where the Palace mosaic consists of self-contained scenes distributed in what seems to be an arbitrary fashion, the Philia mosaic has a predictable arrangement of symmetrically paired animals, each pair flanking a tree. The animals are placed firmly on a ground line at the bottom of the main panel, and while elements of the composition (trees and birds) are carried up to the top of the panel, there is nothing like a register system. Finally, the artist has been at pains to create a unified, illusionistic spatial setting. The ground line is actually a kind of stage, and space sufficient to contain the animals is explicitly depicted, complete with shadows pointing inward from the picture plane.

The hunting pavements of Antioch, dating from the middle to late fifth century, demand more serious consideration.⁶⁸ In the two best-known examples, the so called Worcester and Megalopsychia Hunts, groups of hunter and prey are placed on the perimeter, one group to each edge. Trees further separate the groups, without actually framing them (Fig. 60). The outer edges of the panels func-

tion as ground lines, but there is no attempt, as in the Philia mosaic or the mosaic from Uthina, to represent the solid ground on which the figures stand, let alone a detailed or unified landscape. Like the Uthina mosaic, the Worcester Hunt can be read, with effort, as a schematic or conceptual representation of a single scene, but this is not true of the Megalopsychia mosaic. Here, the figures bear the names of famous hunters of mythology; we know, therefore, that the episodes, while formally similar, are completely separate in time and place. Finally, there is a definite register structure, although it is adapted to the form of the panel and the composition as a whole, making the inner and outer registers concentric rather than parallel.

The Megalopsychia mosaic successfully integrates the tendencies which we have seen in the mosaics of Uthina and Constantine. It should therefore represent a step closer to the Palace mosaic than either of these earlier works, or, for that matter, than anything we have considered up to this point. This is certainly true as regards the technique of setting images against a plain background, but not as regards the appearance of the composition as a whole. The devices that separate the episodes also give the mosaic a rigid, geometric structure. Ultimately, the requirements of unity overrule any sense of openness or of separate episodes held in stasis. Thus while the Megalopsychia mosaic is close to the Palace mosaic in certain aspects of its composition, in others it is very far indeed.

A group of mosaics from the late fifth century illustrate a tendency toward looser compositional structures, closely reminiscent of the "animal carpet" and Orpheus pavements of earlier centuries. These include mosaics from the Basilica of Photios at HUARTÉ in Syria, dated to 483–485;⁶⁹ from the nave of the Michaelion at HUARTÉ, of 487;⁷⁰ and two mosaics datable to the same general period, from a villa at Jenah in Lebanon⁷¹ and from the Martyrium of Seleucia at Antioch (Fig. 61).⁷² The Antioch mosaic is of particular interest because of its lack of ground lines, landscape elements, or

⁶⁶Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch."

⁶⁷D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Princeton, 1947), 317 ff. Levi dates the mosaic as late as the third quarter of the 5th century. Kitlinger, however, favors the earlier date ("Studies on Late Antique and Early Byzantine Floor Mosaics," *DOP* 6 [1951], 83–124, esp. 96–97).

⁶⁸Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*; Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch."

⁶⁹P. and M. T. Canivet, "I complessi cristiani del IV° e del V° secolo a Huarte (Siria Settentrionale)," *RACr* 56 (1980), 147–72, fig. 6.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, fig. 9.

⁷¹M. Chehab, *Mosaïques du Liban. Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* 14–15 (1957–58), pl. 31; Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 271–72.

⁷²Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 359 ff; Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," 188.

consistent orientation. However, it conspicuously lacks the varied, self-contained imagery of the Palace mosaic.

Of far greater relevance is the mosaic floor of a baptistry on Mt. Nebo in Jordan, dated by inscription to 531 (Fig. 62).⁷³ It is a register composition with a plain ground and no ground lines. The only landscape features are trees and plants, which change character from register to register, and are obviously not meant to evoke a unified landscape. This discontinuity reflects a larger one, that of subject matter. Reading from top to bottom of the mosaic panel, there are two registers of hunting scenes, one register with a shepherd and his flock, and one with two men leading exotic animals. The thematic connection of the scenes is unclear, and this is precisely what makes the mosaic important for our study. It is the earliest known example of a rigidly structured assemblage of unframed images with no spatial, temporal, or obvious thematic unity—set off against a continuous unadorned mosaic ground.⁷⁴ It is true that the pictorial units are entire registers rather than vignettes within registers, but even allowing for this fact the Nebo mosaic represents an enormous step toward the compositional scheme of the Palace mosaic. Beyond this point, the Palace mosaic may represent a deliberate break with tradition, and thus be inaccessible to methods of analysis which take for granted a series of small divergences from established models.

Our concern so far has been to determine the Palace mosaic's antecedents and general place in the history of Roman and Byzantine art, by focusing on its most distinctive feature, its composition. I have shown that the Palace mosaic brings together several distinct compositional types. These types came into existence at different times, but all were well established by the middle of the sixth

century. Composition thus suggests an approximate terminus post quem corresponding to the one provided by archaeological evidence. The differences between the Palace mosaic and any of its compositional antecedents make it unwise to try to fix its date by this means alone. But before applying other criteria, we should consider a problem which is implicit in our findings, and central to our understanding of the mosaic's date and the circumstances of its creation.

It is only to be expected that in reviewing the compositional evolution which culminates in the Palace mosaic, we should assume it to be continuous. This means that the later examples would be closer to the Palace mosaic than the earlier ones, not only in time but in the directness with which they, or other works like them, influenced its creation. Since these later examples are from the Greek East, it should follow that certain basic principles of mosaic composition, originating in the West, were transmitted to the East and naturalized there, prolonging an essentially unbroken tradition. Lavin's study of the Antioch hunting pavements leaves no doubt that such transmissions did indeed take place. The extent to which they figure in the ancestry of the Palace mosaic is another matter. We have seen that the mosaics of fifth-century Antioch, especially the hunting mosaics which are central to Lavin's argument, have little in common with the Palace mosaic. Mosaics of the late fifth century from HUARTÉ may point in the general direction of the Palace mosaic, but only the Nebo baptistry mosaic of 531 can fairly be called a close antecedent. In contrast, the earlier, western phase of the development includes a number of mosaics which might be regarded, in purely formal terms, as close, even direct antecedents of the Palace mosaic. In particular, the Nile mosaic from El Alia (Fig. 53) and the mosaic of rural life from Uthina (Fig. 55) offer parallels to the composition of the Palace mosaic which are, in their own way, every bit as strong as those at Nebo.

The problem with accepting these correspondences at face value—as evidence of *direct* influence—is the length of time separating the Palace mosaic from its western predecessors, and the decisive shift of cultural dominance from west to east which took place during that time. Nevertheless, the evidence for a direct link between the Palace mosaic and earlier western, specifically North African prototypes is too strong to ignore. Near the beginning of this section, I pointed out the similar-

⁷³ M. Piccirillo, "New Discoveries on Mt. Nebo," *Jordan, Annual of the Department of Antiquities* 21 (1976), 56–59; idem, "Campagna archeologica nella basilica di Mosè profeta sul monte Nebo-Siyagha," *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Liber Annuus* 26 (1976), 281–318; idem, *I mosaici di Giordania* (Rome, 1986).

⁷⁴ The juxtaposition of animal combat scenes with a litter carried by donkeys, in the north aisle of the Michaelion at HUARTÉ (above, note 70) may anticipate this development by almost fifty years, at least as regards the lack of thematic coherence. However, the evidence is insufficient to allow a firm conclusion. In its own time the composition of the Nebo baptistry mosaic is not unique. A church pavement from Madaba, badly vandalized in antiquity, was clearly all but identical to the Nebo mosaic both in composition and figure style (U. Lux, "Ein altchristliche Kirche in Madaba," *ZDPV* 83 (1967), 165–82).

ities between the inhabited scroll border of the Palace mosaic and scroll ornament from the villa at Zliten (Fig. 44), and between one of the masks in the Palace border and a head of Oceanus from Sidi el-Hani (Fig. 48). To these similarities we may add two more: between horses in the Palace mosaic (no. 54, Fig. 12) and at the top left corner of the Nile mosaic from El Alia; and between the reclining female figures in the Palace mosaic (no. 2, Fig. 13) and in a mosaic from Carthage (Fig. 63).⁷⁵ Such specific connections cast doubt on the assumption that western and eastern mosaics represent successive phases in the ancestry of the Palace mosaic, that the later phase inevitably eclipsed the earlier, and that North Africa therefore exerted only an indirect influence on the character of the Palace mosaic.

The overall development of mosaic composition reinforces the possibility that, in the case of the Palace mosaic at least, West and East represent complementary rather than successive influences. If it is unlikely that the Palace mosaic derives only from such prototypes as the mosaic of El Alia and Uthina, it is just as unlikely to be based exclusively on compositions of the Nebo type. For the whole, as for the parts, we should recognize the influence of two separate, cognate traditions. Although it would be going too far to say that such a double influence could only have been possible in the reign of Heraclius, that emperor's connection with Carthage provides the best explanation for the mosaic's North African character. There are indications that Carthage in the seventh century, far from being an isolated and declining provincial outpost, was a cultural center of some importance.⁷⁶ In such a climate the idea of artists or antiquarians studying the earlier mosaics of the region should not surprise us. What is remarkable is that circumstances should have arisen which allowed such interest to play a major role in the cre-

ation of one of the most important works of Constantinopolitan art.⁷⁷

Taken by itself, this is circumstantial evidence at best. It is fortunate that other aspects of the Palace mosaic, its treatment of space and its figure styles, suggest specific comparisons with works of both the sixth and seventh centuries, and thus provide more rigorous criteria for dating the mosaic.

The spatial structure of the Palace mosaic combines two seemingly irreconcilable tendencies. Despite considerable variation in style, the figures convey a strong sense of spatial naturalism, enhanced by the use of overlapping to indicate recession into depth and the relative placement of figures. (This is a simple technique, but it is handled with great expertness, as in the three goats in no. 65, Figs. 1 and 14.) However, in virtually every other respect the mosaic seems to downplay the sense of space—in some respects to negate it altogether. Many of the figural groups presuppose a landscape setting, but the features of landscape which suggest space are used infrequently if at all. Ground lines and backdrops rarely appear; like the rocks, trees, and other individual landscape elements, they are important not because they give depth to a two-dimensional image, but because they give specificity to an abbreviated one. Horizon lines are never used, nor is there any shading of the mosaic ground to indicate recession. Indeed, with some exceptions (e.g., nos. 11, 12, 21, 38, 47, 60, 65), the ground is completely undifferentiated. This is not in itself a denial of space, but rather an extremely schematic treatment of space, since it allows the viewer mentally to reconstruct a three-dimensional setting appropriate to the identity, actions, and relative placement of the figures, all of which the mosaic makes clear.⁷⁸

In another sense, the undifferentiated ground actively undermines the illusion of space. There is no demarcation between scenes; the sky of one scene becomes, imperceptibly, the earth of another. This creates no special difficulty if one examines no more than one scene at a time, but over the mosaic as a whole it seems to imply that the

⁷⁵J. Fink, "Ikonographische Miszellen zur römischen Grabkunst," *RACr* 49 (1973), 163–69, fig. 2.

⁷⁶Averil Cameron, "Byzantine Africa: The Literary Evidence," *Excavations at Carthage 1978 Conducted by the University of Michigan*, VII (Ann Arbor, 1982), 29–62; S. Ellis, "Carthage in the Seventh Century an Expanding Population?" *Cahiers des Etudes Anciennes* (University of Quebec at Trois Rivières), 17 (1986), 32–42; idem, "Byzantine Carthage—A Western Constantinople" (unpub. paper read at the 17th International Byzantine Congress, Washington, D.C., 1986; see their *Abstracts of Short Papers*, 105). A school of mosaicists is known to have been active there in the reign of Maurice, if not later. See N. Duval and A. Lézine, "La chapelle funéraire dite d'Astérius à Carthage," *MélRome* 71 (1959), 339–57.

⁷⁷Heraclius' connection with North Africa has equally important implications for the symbolic reading of the Palace mosaic, which I shall discuss in the following section.

⁷⁸For the ability of Late Antique and Byzantine viewers to reconstruct a three-dimensional reality from schematic renderings in two dimensions, see Trilling, "Late Antique and Sub-Antique."

various figures and groups all share a single space. Since we already know that the scenes are separate and self-contained, there is a direct contradiction between what the mosaic gives us in purely visual terms, and the conventions of spatial representation by which we order and interpret what we see. By using the continuous ground to unify the mosaic, the artist has upset the careful separation and internal spatial logic of the individual scenes. In effect, the entire composition has been transposed into a non-representational space: a space, that is, with no meaning or existence outside the two-dimensional reality of the mosaic surface.

The scale-like pattern of the ground magnifies this effect. Seen from a distance, and in the areas between scenes, it adds to the sense of two-dimensionality by calling attention to the surface, for the most part unobtrusively. Seen from close up, it becomes a major factor in the mosaic's style. When the outlines of the figures are unbroken, there is a clear separation of figure and ground, enforced by a band two tesserae in width enclosing each figure. However, the more irregular the outline, the less abrupt the demarcation. Human and animal heads, in particular, tend to be surrounded by transitional areas in which the rows of ground tesserae echo figural outlines while at the same time expanding and coalescing into their own characteristic pattern (no. 34, Fig. 15; no. 22, Fig. 16; no. 8, Color pl. B). Whether the ground thus treated appears to crystallize around the figures, or the figures to crystallize from the ground, the result is an assimilation of the "solid" figures to their two-dimensional matrix. It is hard to imagine a more radical contradiction of the mosaic's illusionistic qualities.

The result is a strange compromise in which figures and whole scenes shift unpredictably between two and three dimensions. Space as a pictorial element is eliminated, except for what is established by the three-dimensionality of the figures themselves, and by overlapping. On one level, these simple devices are enough to stimulate mental recreation of a convincing spatial setting for each image. On another, the figures are perceived in three dimensions, but their setting is not. The figures appear flush with the surface because there is no indication of space between it and them, yet they emerge from the surface into three dimensions. They do not, however, emerge into a three-dimensional ambient space: each figure defines and occupies precisely the amount of space it

needs to exist, and no more, whether inward from the surface or in any direction on it. The lack of a continuous illusionistic spatial setting effectively isolates the figures; to a considerable extent it substitutes for the use of frames as a way of imposing stability and self-sufficiency on the diverse images which make up the composition. On a third and final level, the assimilation of the figures to the mosaic's surface, especially through the use of patterned ground, calls into question the very meaning of spatial illusionism. We shall see that this complex and paradoxical structure, in particular the combination of three-dimensional figures with a non-spatial setting, is essential to our understanding of the Palace mosaic's date.

The Nebo Baptistry mosaic of 531 (Fig. 62), which we have considered as a possible compositional forebear of the Palace mosaic, seems at first glance to provide a close analogy for its spatial structure as well. However, the far greater regularity of its registers, the minimal use of overlapping, and the flatness of the figure style make it all but impossible to visualize a three-dimensional setting, and hence preclude the kind of spatial complexity that characterizes the Palace mosaic. We shall see, too, that this complete rejection of space is not typical of mid-sixth-century art. It appears instead to be a heritage from earlier centuries, from a development culminating in the mosaics of fifth-century Antioch, considered earlier in this section. Beginning with the Justinianic period, there is a new, widespread, and quite separate development from fully realized spatial settings to two-dimensional ones. This development, in which the Nebo mosaic plays no part, carries beyond the reign of Justinian, indeed well into the seventh century, and is responsible for the Palace mosaic's spatial character.

Space and landscape are not the same, but there is no better clue to a culture's understanding of space than its ways of representing landscape. The apse mosaic of the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian in Rome, from 526–530 (Fig. 64), sets the tone for the treatment of both landscape and space in the Justinianic period.⁷⁹ In Kitzinger's words, "The scene takes place on a plausible, if shallow, stage, with grassy ground, water, cloud-bank and sky

⁷⁹G. Matthiae, *Mosaici medioevali delle chiese di Roma* (Rome, 1967), 135ff; J. Wilpert and W. M. Schumacher, *Die römische Mosaiken der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV–XIII Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1976), 328–29 and pls. 101–6.

forming so many planes one behind the other; and the figures, which are voluminous, indeed ponderous, are organic entities using this space freely and expansively.”⁸⁰ What matters for our purposes is not the depth of the setting but the fact that it exists at all, that the figures occupy a space which is not left to the imagination to reconstruct, but is literally, if exiguously, represented. A generation later, around 549, the apse mosaic from S. Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna (Fig. 65)⁸¹ makes use of similar but much more elaborate landscape. As in the earlier mosaic, its subject matter is visionary. Both works depict mystical apparitions of Christ, and both bring together figures from sacred history in combinations that deny, or transcend, the limitations of historic time. It is of special interest, therefore, that the artists should be so concerned to give their images a firm basis in physical, or at least spatial, reality. This is not to say that either mosaic is unambiguously illusionistic. The Ravenna mosaic, in particular, has a harshly abstract register composition which contradicts, and in great part disguises, the continuity and detail of its natural setting. But disguise is not negation; the setting remains.

Although the sense of ambient space exemplified by SS. Cosmas and Damian is fundamental to Justinianic art, it is frequently subsumed in a love of spatial complexity and a sophisticated sense of paradox, which simultaneously affirms and denies the third dimension. This sounds very much like the Palace mosaic, but where the Palace mosaic negates ambient space altogether, Justinianic art favors elaborate spatial settings, by no means all of them landscapes. The sense of paradox comes into

play when, instead of defining a rational recession into depth, the setting or the placement of figures, or both, lead the eye *outward* again to the picture plane. The mosaic from S. Apollinare in Classe does this, “bending” what should be a receding space back toward the viewer, while maintaining the continuity and solidity of the setting.⁸² In its most extreme form, the defiance of rationality seems playful, recalling, for a modern viewer, the work of Escher. Perhaps no other work of the period gives a more vivid sense of spatial play than the famous ivory plaque with an archangel, in the British Museum (Fig. 66).⁸³ The angel stands at the top of a flight of six steps, which should place him, illusionistically, at a measurable—and considerable—distance from the surface. Yet his staff rests on a low pilaster shown level with the bottom step, hence level with the surface itself. The fact that the angel’s body also appears level with the surface distracts from the spatial paradox, but does nothing to resolve it.

Insofar as this manipulation of space is typical of the Justinianic period, it tends strongly to exclude the Palace mosaic, which we have seen to be organized on equally complex but fundamentally different principles. So far, however, we have dealt only on the level of principles. Let us now consider two works from the reign of Justinian which bear a significant resemblance, both stylistic and thematic, to the Palace mosaic. The first is a hunting mosaic from Apamea in Syria, now in the Brussels Museum (Fig. 67).⁸⁴ Its subject matter, episodic composition, scale-patterned ground, and such details as the hunter and hare at the lower right⁸⁵ relate this work closely to the Palace mosaic. Although it includes an inscription datable to 539, the inscription mentions only the restoration of the room, not the crucial laying of the mosaic. It has been suggested that the mosaic is earlier than

Insofar as an emperor’s reign corresponds to a distinct artistic epoch, the features which make that epoch distinct owe their predominance, if not to the emperor’s own tastes, then to the tastes of his close associates. The greater the social distance which separates a work of Byzantine art from the imperial court, the greater the chance that other tastes and conventions than those of the court will influence its creation. In speaking of a Justinianic style, I have confined myself to works which are known or reasonably surmised to emanate from the court, or whose combination of technical and intellectual virtuosity presupposes a highly sophisticated patron in more or less direct touch with courtly fashions. Only such works can strictly be called *Justinianic*, rather than mid-6th century. The works whose spatial structure I shall discuss should not be assumed to represent the art of their period throughout the empire and on every level of patronage. However, their elite character gives them particular weight in direct comparisons with the Palace mosaic.

⁸⁰ *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 93.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 101–2; F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes. Kommentar*, 2 (Wiesbaden, 1976), 245 ff.

⁸² Kitzinger has shown that similar tendencies underlie the slightly earlier decoration of S. Vitale, arguably the most representative example of Justinianic figural art (*Byzantine Art in the Making*, 82–88). The decisive change in style which he sees between the two works, with the Classe mosaic representing a new impulse toward abstraction, must therefore be set against their underlying spatial consistency. Kitzinger’s own emphasis is on S. Vitale as the expression of a balance between opposing pictorial tendencies, rather than on spatial paradox or ambiguity for its own sake. However, his discussion of the contemporary ivory throne of Maximian emphasizes the importance of deliberate paradox, or as he calls it, “irrationality” (*ibid.*, 95).

⁸³ *Age of Spirituality*, no. 481, pp. 536–37.

⁸⁴ J. Balty, *La grande mosaïque de chasse du Triclinos* (Brussels, 1969). The mosaic was badly damaged by fire in 1946.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pls. XL, 3–4; XLI, 2–3.

539, perhaps even as early as the fourth century.⁸⁶ However, I believe that spatial conventions establish the Apamea mosaic as a work of the later period, confirming the date provided by the inscription. The features which relate the Apamea mosaic to the reign of Justinian are those in which it differs decisively from the Palace mosaic.

Shadows cast at the feet of men and animals establish not a ground line, but a ground *plane*, on which the action of the hunt takes place. This ground plane is not the picture plane, but appears to slant inward from it. Plants and trees, though rather widely spaced, suggest that it is meant to function as a continuous setting. There is, however, no consistent sense of recession: the ground plane, and the figures on it, appear no further from the picture plane at the top of the composition than at the bottom. This does not mean that the figures are merely flattened against the picture plane. On the contrary, there is a constant sense of movement *into* the picture, away from the surface. This movement even bridges the gap between registers, and here, above all, we find the emphasis on spatial paradox which makes the mosaic typically Justinianic. Starting at the bottom left corner, it is possible to view the group of a hunter and two hounds without any particular spatial confusion. The same is true of the spearman and the two hares at the bottom right. The leopard, however, seems to be springing *inward* from the picture plane (i.e., *away* from the viewer) as well as upward *along* the picture plane. It thus establishes not only a surface connection between the two bottom registers, but a connection in depth. The second register is behind the first, and there is a clear progression inward from the hunters to the leopard to the boar. This is not simply a matter of abstract structure, but makes sense as a somewhat fanciful and abbreviated narrative. The hunter on the right engages the leopard directly. The hunter on the left, with his hounds, appears to have been distracted from his pursuit of the hares by the appearance of one of the larger animals, probably the boar.⁸⁷ The two hunts converge as the leopard attacks the boar. Both hunters thus participate in the movement inward from the picture plane and upward along the mosaic surface.

No sooner has this recession been established

than it is violently contradicted. The drawing of the leopard's hindquarters clearly indicates movement away from the picture plane, but the front part of its body appears flush with the surface. This is even more strikingly true of the boar, since the creature's head and shoulders appear to be turned *outward* toward the viewer, and its foreleg actually overlaps the leopard's paw. Similarly, in the register above, the hindquarters of the horse on the right indicate movement inward, while its forequarters turn outward, and the placement of the hoofs shows that it will pass the tiger on the outside. It should be clear from this description that in its impulse to create a rational spatial setting, and at the same time to reduce it to irrationality, the Apamea mosaic is comparable to the archangel ivory, or to any of the other works which we have seen to typify Justinianic spatial conventions.

The second work to be singled out for its close resemblance to the Palace mosaic is a silver plate in the Hermitage in Leningrad, depicting a herdsman with a dog and two goats (Fig. 41).⁸⁸ Datable by its control stamps to the reign of Justinian, and corresponding to the Palace mosaic both in subject matter and in overall figure style, it is probably the strongest single piece of evidence for a sixth-century date for the mosaic.⁸⁹ However, the two works differ profoundly in their spatial structure. The goatherd plate combines two configurations. The first is two-dimensional. The various elements of the scene appear suspended against the surface. This effect is due in great part to the use of what appears to be a ground line, extending halfway across the center of the plate and supporting the standing goat and the tree. This line seems not only to isolate the part of the image comprising the goat and tree, but, in accordance with the purpose and nature of ground lines, to define the lower limit of a pictorial space. The suggestion that space begins *there* is tantamount to a denial of space in the image as a whole: the goat and the tree are already flush with the surface, there is no indication of figures, objects, or landscape behind them,

⁸⁸E. Cruikshank Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 70–71.

⁸⁹Cf. Nordhagen, "The Mosaics of the Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors," 59. Many of the silver plates which survive from early Byzantine times offer significant parallels to the Palace mosaic. Some are conclusively dated by their stamps; others have been variously attributed to the 5th, 6th, and 7th centuries, often without careful, let alone systematic, attention to the unifying or differentiating characteristics of their style. In my search for both 6th- and 7th-century analogues to the Palace mosaic, I have confined myself to the plates whose origin in a particular reign is not in question.

⁸⁶Ibid., 26 ff. An early dating of this mosaic is a cornerstone of Salies' argument for the date of the Palace mosaic.

⁸⁷The combination of hounds and nets was used in hunting both hare and boar; see J. K. Anderson, *Hunting in the Ancient World* (Berkeley, 1985).

and anything we might see or imagine in front of them, that is, everything below the ground line, cannot, by definition, belong to the same space.⁹⁰ Seen in this way, the image is unified only by our awareness that its elements belong together: there is no intrinsic spatial continuity. It is the projection of a three-dimensional scene onto a two-dimensional surface, not a systematic translation of three dimensions into two.

As we might expect from previous examples, the second configuration is three-dimensional, and thus contradicts the first. The surface below the ground line, with its scattering of plants as well as figures, is easy to read as a continuous landscape, not so much bounded as cut off at the bottom by the ornamental border of the plate. What had previously appeared as a ground line now becomes a horizon line. Closer examination reveals that it plays another, more specific spatial role. At its left end, it bends into an irregular step-like form, indicating that while the surface on which the tree and goat stand is continuous with that occupied by the other figures, it is not level with it. The recognition that this surface corresponds to a raised area, such as a rocky outcropping, adds a convincing detail to the setting, and at the same time explains why the tree and goat appear so sharply outlined against the sky. Seen in this way, the plate is a spatially consistent rendering of an extensive scene.

Once recognized, the three-dimensional reading tends to dominate, but as in the other Justinianic works we have examined, there is a constant tension between surface and depth, and above all a tendency to make the most distant parts of the scene appear level with the picture plane. Perhaps the closest spatial parallel to the goatherd plate is the mosaic of S. Apollinare in Classe, with its high horizon line creating a broad expanse of ground, and its trees extending above the horizon. While it is true that the undifferentiated ground to the left of the herdsman recalls the ground of the Palace mosaic, the differences between the two works are more important. We have seen that the Palace mosaic has its own spatial ambiguities, but to an overwhelming extent they involve the relation of indi-

vidual figures to ambient space—really the *lack* of ambient space—while the goatherd plate, like other works of its time, takes ambient space for granted, if only as the basis for paradoxical manipulation. One telling consequence of this difference is that the Palace mosaic relies heavily on overlapping to indicate recession: an idiom that denies ambient space provides no other unequivocal way of achieving this effect. (By no means every scene in the Palace mosaic makes use of overlapping, but figures which do not overlap are generally meant to be read in the same plane. The most striking exception is the family of bears in no. 66, Fig. 17). In contrast, none of the figures in the plate overlap. On the one hand, this makes it possible to read the composition in two dimensions, an essential feature of the ambiguity so important in Justinianic art. On the other hand, the artist's ability to conceive and represent, however sketchily, a unified spatial setting, with ambient space and recession into depth implicit in the landscape itself, gives the composition its basic three-dimensional character without such obvious devices as overlapping.

Up to this point, we have been concerned with the fundamental differences between the spatial conventions of the Palace mosaic and of selected works from the Justinianic period. There is, however, one major work from the reign of Justinian which offers a genuine parallel to the spatial structure of the Palace mosaic. This is the apse mosaic from the monastery church of St. Catherine at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Fig. 68).⁹¹ Like the Palace mosaic, it combines three-dimensional figures with a non-spatial, non-representational setting.⁹² However, the analogy between the two works is by no means complete. At Sinai, the setting is a departure from everything we have seen to be typically Justinianic, but the figures show a concern with volume that looks back to SS. Cosmas and Damian. Contorted

⁹¹ G. M. Forsyth and K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor, 1973). The mosaic dates from the second half of the emperor's reign (548–565).

⁹² "The figures are not really supported by the terrain. One might just barely conceive of the two prophets as standing on it. The recumbent Peter is in front of it, while the two kneeling apostles, while strongly three-dimensional in themselves, are oddly poised on its razor-thin upper edge" (Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 100). The effect is even more drastic than Kitzinger suggests. Clothed in the illusion of monumentality, but without anything like a commensurate illusion of weight, the figures seem like balloons, ready to float away if their invisible tethers were to be cut. This does not, of course, apply to the figure of Christ, anchored by his central placement, frontal stance, and surrounding mandorla.

⁹⁰ The compositional conventions of Late Roman and Byzantine silver accentuate this effect. Ground lines tend to divide the body of a plate from the exergue, which often contains figures or objects conceptually but not spatially related to the primary scene. In the goatherd plate, it is as though the whole lower half of the composition were relegated to the exergue; one may experience a moment of disorientation before recognizing the trick and reintegrating the scene.

postures and inflated drapery seem to demand a spatial setting, and thus call attention to the lack of one. Instead of a balance between figures and ground, as in the Palace mosaic, there is a wrenching disjunction. Thus, while the Sinai mosaic points toward the spatial conventions of the Palace mosaic, it cannot by itself account for them. The resolution of the conflicts which create such awkwardness at Sinai is an achievement of the seventh century.

Perhaps no other work illustrates this achievement so clearly as the apse mosaic of 625–638 in the church of S. Agnese in Rome (Fig. 69).⁹³ It may be asked what an image so austere, so apparently complete in its rejection of corporeality as well as space, could have in common with the Palace mosaic. Study of the original reveals what most photographs of S. Agnese obscure: the figures exist in three dimensions, though hardly to an extent comparable to those at Sinai. To take only the most striking example, St. Agnes' leg is held forward, so that the edge of the garment reveals the outline of the limb. This is a restrained and subtle handling of corporeality, not a rejection of it.⁹⁴ The rigid, two-dimensional character of the figures owes more to their pose, costume, and isolation than to an underlying spatial conception. Even seen in this way, S. Agnese is still very distant from the Palace mosaic, but we may now fruitfully compare it to a work which corresponds to the Palace mosaic in both style and subject matter.

This is a silver plate in the Hermitage, datable between 613 and 630, depicting a maenad and Silenus dancing (Fig. 70).⁹⁵ Remarkably, the spatial conventions of the apse and the plate are virtually identical. The two dancing figures balance on a sharp edge barely identifiable with solid ground; there is no landscape setting—the exergue, like the colored strip on which the figures stand in S. Agnese, is a signitive rather than a pictorial element—and no indication of ambient space.⁹⁶ Even the attitudes of the figures do not create an unbridgeable gap between the two works. For all their

exuberance, the dancers occupy a very shallow space indeed. There is little foreshortening of the kind that suggests recession into depth, and the most uninhibited movements serve only to bring their limbs and bodies into line with the picture plane. Just as the figures in S. Agnese are far less spatially confined than they first appear to be, those in the plate are far more so. The art of the first half of the seventh century is known to embody two major stylistic currents: one abstract and dematerialized, the other organic and based on Greco-Roman principles.⁹⁷ These currents are most easily perceived as polar opposites. However, the shared assumptions of two such different works as S. Agnese and the maenad plate enable us to see a unifying principle at work, transcending the boundaries between Greek East and Latin West, and between religious austerity and flamboyant Hellenism. Needless to say, the Palace mosaic, which preserves the Greco-Roman heritage as faithfully as any other work of Byzantine art, and far more systematically, belongs to the same current as the plate. This is true on the obvious level of theme and figure style, and on the deeper level of spatial convention. What appears to be a contradiction—that by this very fact the Palace mosaic is also linked to the current of radical abstraction—is actually the key to an understanding of the mosaic's context and date.

If the apse of S. Agnese is the most straightforward example of Byzantine spatial conventions in the first half of the seventh century, the silver plate with the combat of David and Goliath, in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 71), epitomizes the richness and complexity which these conventions permitted.⁹⁸ The ground line on which the six figures stand (I refer only to the combat itself, not the prelude and sequel shown above and below it) is

more the tower, do suggest some kind of recession, but it is definitely not continuous: there is nothing to connect them with the figures. Indeed, the artist appears so uncomfortable with the idea of a continuous space, that while the forequarters of the horses are rendered in vivid relief, their hindquarters are reduced to barely perceptible outline, as though physical existence ended at the picture plane.

⁹⁷ Kitzinger, "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm"; idem, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, chs. 6–7.

⁹⁸ It is the largest of a set of nine, depicting scenes from the life of David. Six are in the Metropolitan Museum, and three in the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia. The best published photographs, and a basic bibliography, may be found in *Age of Spirituality*, 475–83. The David plates date from between 613 and 630, and their choice of subject matter reflects the events and ideological currents of Heraclius' reign: see below, p. 60 and note 146.

⁹³ Matthiae, *Mosaici medievali delle chiese di Roma*, 169–79.

⁹⁴ For the basis of this way of interpreting "dematerialized" images, see Trilling, "Late Antique and Sub-Antique." For a contrary view of the figures in S. Agnese, see Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 103.

⁹⁵ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, no. 70, pp. 202–3.

⁹⁶ In this connection it is interesting to look at another example of secular art in silver from the reign of Heraclius: the Meleager plate in the Hermitage (Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, no. 57, pp. 176–77.). According to David Wright, it "has implications of a continuous landscape setting" ("The Shape of the Seventh Century in Byzantine Art," 11). The tree, and even

irregular and dotted with plants, but there is no other attempt to suggest a landscape, either receding or folded back toward the surface in the manner so characteristic of Justinianic art. Space as a separate compositional element, expressed through setting and atmosphere, is thus completely absent. This does not mean, however, that the scene was conceived without regard to space or spatial relations: quite the contrary. The detailing of musculature, costumes, and armor—the play of David's cloak and tunic over his body is the most striking example—creates an overwhelming sense of corporeality: as in the Palace mosaic, the figures do not so much occupy space as define it. As for spatial relationships, each figure overlaps or is overlapped by at least one other figure. David is foremost, his garments overlapping Goliath's spear and shield, and each combatant determines the placement of his followers. This device, it should be noted, affirms their relative position, not the extent of space in its own right. Not only is there no indication of the distance between figures (except on the picture plane itself), but the entire scene is unnaturally and awkwardly compressed.

This consequence may not have mattered to the artist, or he may have considered it a fair price to pay for the ability to position his figures unmistakably. The importance of such positioning becomes clear if we contrast the spatial structure of the combat with that of Justinian's procession in S. Vitale. Despite the difference of subject, the relative, hierarchical placement of figures is very similar in both works.

But in the mosaic, such features as overlapping, placement of feet, and the relative size of the figures create an ambiguity that is not meant to be resolved: no amount of analysis will permit the eye to rest on a single "rational" interpretation of the scene.⁹⁹ In the silver plate, the spatial relationships are completely consistent, however artificial the technique by which they are established. There can be no better measure of the different functions of space in Justinianic and seventh-century art. The Palace mosaic, with its three-dimensional figures and rational spatial relationships defined against a non-spatial background, belongs to the seventh century, and points the way to the definition of a Heraclian style.

So far, I have used the development of composition to show that the Palace mosaic cannot be ear-

lier than the sixth century, and the changing conception of pictorial space to show that it cannot be earlier than the seventh. Spatial comparisons point to a date in the reign of Heraclius. We may turn for confirmation to the treatment of the figures themselves—the "style" of the mosaic, in the most general sense of the term, but also, more specifically, style on the level of detail. The Palace mosaic's most pervasive stylistic feature is, of course, its classicism. I have already pointed out that in dating the mosaic this is more of a hindrance than a help; one is easily drawn into a search for antecedents, which obscures the mosaic's own style, and hence its date. (An exception is the mosaic's connection with earlier North African art; here, an awareness of its antecedents indirectly supports the attribution to Heraclius.) Nor can classicism, in and of itself, indicate a particular date, since classical styles are integral to Byzantine art of both the sixth and seventh centuries. It is of course significant that the maenad plate, the Meleager plate, the silver bucket with mythological figures in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna,¹⁰⁰ and the nine David plates, are all firmly dated to the reign of Heraclius, and the fresco of the Maccabees in S. Maria Antiqua to the same approximate period.¹⁰¹ clearly there was a flourishing classical culture in the first half of the seventh century. But if we wish a true understanding of the Palace mosaic's style, we must examine it on a level of detail where even the most studied adherence to an earlier style fails to disguise the conventions of the artist's own time.

The maenad plate, so important to our analysis of spatial convention, is of limited use here, reminding us only of one of the forms which classicism could take during the reign of Heraclius.¹⁰² Of much greater significance is the dramatic but almost arbitrary use of highlights in the Palace mosaic (as seen in the mounted hunter, no. 26, Fig. 18, and the camel-riders, no. 18, Fig. 19 and Color pl. C) and the encaustic icon of St. Peter from Sinai (Fig. 72), a work which I have attributed to the second quarter of the seventh century.¹⁰³ This is an isolated stylistic device, and is therefore far more

⁹⁹ Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, no. 56, pp. 174–75.

¹⁰¹ P. Romanelli and P. J. Nordhagen, *S. Maria Antiqua* (Rome, 1964); P. J. Nordhagen, "S. Maria Antiqua: The Frescoes of the Seventh Century," *Acta IR Norv* 8 (1978), 89–142; Kitlinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 113 ff and color pl. vii.

¹⁰² For the concept of "perennial hellenism" in Byzantine art, see Kitlinger, "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm."

¹⁰³ For the date of the icon, see Trilling, "Sinai Icons: Another Look."

⁹⁹ Kitlinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, 87–88.

likely to reflect a particular time of origin than is the classicism of the maenad plate. The problem with this approach is that too few dated or datable works survive from the seventh century to permit an absolutely convincing framework of comparisons.

More general tendencies in Late Antique and Byzantine art suggest a different approach to dating by style. In both composition and space, the Palace mosaic is unified, in the sense that principles deduced from a relatively small area hold true for every other part of the work. Detail is another matter. A project as large as the Palace mosaic requires many workmen, whose differences of background and training are revealed in their handling of details. Much as one might wish to know how many "hands" were involved in the work, the fragmentary state of the mosaic, its present inaccessibility, and the lack of a uniformly detailed photographic record make such an investigation impractical. It is clear, however, that the Palace mosaic has a "range of compatibility," within which disparate styles could be juxtaposed without discordance, or actually synthesized. This range of compatibility, rather than any one style within it, ultimately enables us to fix the mosaic's date.

The stylistic range of the Palace mosaic is clear from two details: the head of Oceanus from the border (Color pl. A) and the bear devouring a lamb or kid (no. 35, Fig. 20). The first style is characterized by surface dynamism and precise linear control, down to the smallest units, the individual rows of tesserae. While the resulting shapes do not necessarily correspond to those of flesh, muscle, and bone, they nonetheless create a strong sense of contour and movement over the surface, a compelling abstract analogue to organic form. It should be noted, however, that this is very much a *surface* effect: the same devices which heighten illusionism by inviting and focusing the eye's movement may undermine it by reducing three-dimensional contours to two-dimensional linear patterns. (The resulting spatial ambiguity recapitulates, on a small scale, the effect we have seen in the spatial structure of the mosaic as a whole.) The second style is loosely structured and lacking in tension. Detailing is imprecise, and large areas are represented by fairly uniform rows of tesserae with little color modulation. The effect is overwhelmingly two-dimensional. Inevitably, outlines are emphasized, but while they are freed from the constraints of anatomy they do not exploit the expressive possibilities of distortion. The boneless,

insubstantial limbs of the bear in Figure 20 belie the fierceness of its attack.

Both extremes have precedents going back several centuries. For the first style, they include the second-century Oceanus head from Sidi el-Hani (Fig. 48),¹⁰⁴ the third-century mosaic of the Cyclopes from Dougga (Fig. 73),¹⁰⁵ and the heads of the saints in the sixth-century apse mosaic of SS. Cosmas and Damian (Fig. 74).¹⁰⁶ The fresco head of St. Paul in S. Maria Antiqua in Rome, from the period of Pope John VII (705–707), makes it clear that essentially the same devices remained in use throughout the seventh century, and were not confined to mosaics.¹⁰⁷ It is easy to ascribe the second style to inferior workmanship, but this would be an oversimplification. I have shown elsewhere that from an early period, similar effects were an almost inevitable and widely accepted consequence of Greco-Roman figural techniques.¹⁰⁸ They are especially widespread in Late Antique and Early Byzantine art. Examples are too numerous to list, but include floor mosaics from Delphi (Fig. 75),¹⁰⁹ Heraklea Lynkestis in Yugoslavia,¹¹⁰ Apamea,¹¹¹ Gasr el-Lebia,¹¹² and Kissufim in Israel.¹¹³

In the Palace mosaic, the precise articulation of the Oceanus head is rarely if ever found outside the border. (Its use in this subordinate position suggests that it was not regarded as an intrinsically superior style.) The looser structure seen in the image of the bear is much more common. Nevertheless, many of the figures fall between the two extremes, lacking or rejecting true modeling, but using patterns in the tesserae to create an abstract, linear analogue to modeling. The head of the dog in no. 22, Figure 16; the goats in no. 65, Figure 14;

¹⁰⁴ See above, pp. 39–40.

¹⁰⁵ C. Poinssot, *Les ruines de Dougga* (Tunis, 1958), 56.

¹⁰⁶ See above, pp. 47–48.

¹⁰⁷ The subtlest use of this mode is the encaustic icon of Christ from Sinai, with a surface pattern based on individual brushstrokes. The icon is unfortunately not easily datable. I have argued that there is a fundamental similarity of style between it and the head of Oceanus from the border of the Palace mosaic: whatever date is accepted for the mosaic must be accepted for the icon as well (Trilling, "Sinai Icons: Another Look").

¹⁰⁸ Trilling, "Late Antique and Sub-Antique."

¹⁰⁹ M. Spiro, *Critical Corpus of the Mosaic Pavements on the Greek Mainland, Fourth/Sixth Centuries* (New York, 1978), 229–31; Trilling, "Late Antique and Sub-Antique."

¹¹⁰ G. Tomašević, *Heraclea—III. Mosaic Pavement in the Narthex of the Large Basilica* (Bitola, 1967).

¹¹¹ See above, note 52.

¹¹² See above, note 21.

¹¹³ R. Cohen, "The Marvelous Mosaics of Kissufim," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 6, 1 (1980), 16–23; A. Ovadia and S. Mucznik, "The Mosaic Pavement of Kissufim, Israel," *Mosaïque: Recueil d'hommages à Henri Stern* (Paris, 1982), 273–80.

the deer in no. 34, Figure 15; the griffin in no. 39, Figure 21; and the back and shoulder of the man in no. 65, Figure 22 illustrate some of the ways in which such devices give complexity and energy to otherwise unmodulated surfaces.

This analysis of stylistic effects suggests an unlikely comparison: the mid-seventh-century mosaic of St. Demetrius and donors, from the church of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki (Fig. 76).¹¹⁴ In general character the two works could hardly be more different. Yet just as abstraction pervades the Palace mosaic despite an overt emphasis on naturalism, the mosaic of St. Demetrius, for all its abstraction, permits, even demands, a naturalistic reading.¹¹⁵ The undeniable two-dimensionality of the St. Demetrius mosaic comes from symmetry, from the lack of ambient space, and most of all from the garments which seem to fill the entire breadth of the panel, and whose parallel striations encourage us to read them in a single plane. However, the same striations correspond to distinct folds, revealing the action of gravity on the heavy cloth as it follows the actual contours of the bodies. Seen in this way, the costumes cease to define a plane, and become voluminous, even monumental. (It is probably a difference of costume, not of style, that makes it difficult to read the figure of St. Demetrius in three dimensions, just as his young, beardless face seems far less naturalistic than the lined and bearded faces of the donors.) This double effect can be explained only on the level of detail. The long rows of tesserae, repeated almost mechanically, define a flat, monotonous, dematerialized surface. This is one stylistic pole; a contrary force establishes the other. Long, unbroken lines, whether straight or curved, invite the eye to follow them. Many parallel lines accentuate this effect. At St. Demetrius, the resulting visual momentum makes the dematerialized form of the donor on the left seem charged with energy and physical presence, while the interplay of horizontal, diagonal, and vertical movement surrounding the donor on the right defines the figure unmistakably in three dimensions. In both the Palace mosaic and the St. Demetrius mosaic, then, the range of stylistic compatibility extends from naturalistic modeling to extreme two-dimensional abstraction, and in both works the effect depends on a highly visible

linear structure which makes a bridge between the two poles because it can be read as part of either. This range and these structures link the two mosaics as representatives of the same moment in the history of style.

III. THE MOSAIC AND ITS MEANING

The size and diversity of the Palace mosaic, and the fact that it is known almost exclusively from details, have led to its being regarded as a congeries of unrelated images. Brett defines the mosaic's content mainly in negative terms: "a lack . . . of philosophical ideas, allegories, or . . . the more literary and historical aspects of the antique tradition." The only unifying feature which he recognizes is a mood, "a kind of poetic romanticism."¹¹⁶ Similarly, Lavin states, "Try as one may, one can discover no coherent theme or system that would suggest an iconographic program in the ordinary sense."¹¹⁷

The only scholar to contest this view is Stefan Hiller, who interprets selected scenes from the Palace mosaic in the light of patristic thought, and concludes that the mosaic may be read as an allegory of the wisdom of nature and the prefiguration of Christian teaching in the pagan world.¹¹⁸ This reading is attractive, but there are weaknesses in Hiller's argument which ultimately destroy its credibility. In his analysis of individual images, he repeatedly draws conclusions which by his own admission have little or no support in Early Christian art and literature.¹¹⁹ The result is what Anthony Cutler nicely calls a "lack of necessity" in Hiller's interpretation of individual scenes, which fails to inspire confidence in his reading of the mosaic as a whole.¹²⁰ Even more damaging, from a methodological standpoint, is the small proportion of scenes selected for analysis; those which do not support a theological interpretation are simply not discussed. Hiller is aware of the problems of his selective approach, and concludes that the scenes which make up the allegory are scattered among others which have no special significance. Yet it is

¹¹⁴G. and M. Soteriou, *Hē Basilikē tou Hagiou Dēmētriou Thessalonikēs* (Athens, 1952), 193–94; Kitzinger, "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm," 25–27.

¹¹⁵Cf. the relation between the Palace mosaic and the apse mosaic of S. Agnese, as described above, p. 51.

¹¹⁶Brett, "The Mosaic of the Great Palace in Constantinople," 37.

¹¹⁷Lavin, review of *First Report*, 72. Cf. Salies, "Die Datierung," 295.

¹¹⁸Hiller, "Divino senso agnoscere."

¹¹⁹Examples include his identification of the Triumph of Dionysus with Christ's entry into Jerusalem (p. 280), of Pan with St. Christopher (p. 282), and of the cypress tree with the Virgin (p. 292). For the problem of the so-called "Bacchic procession" in the Palace mosaic, see below, note 124.

¹²⁰A. Cutler, "The Elephants of the Great Palace Mosaic," 125.

hard to see how the sort of allegory which Hiller proposes can be meaningful unless it is comprehensive. If the purpose of the mosaic is to show how untutored nature and pagan culture anticipated Christianity, that purpose is undercut by Hiller's admission—or the artist's!—that the greater number of scenes, while indistinguishable in general character from the allegorical ones, have no share in the consecration which an allegorical reading implies.

By rejecting Hiller's interpretation we are thrown back on Brett's and Lavin's assumption that the Palace mosaic is without a coherent thematic structure. Yet it is not so heterogeneous as it might first appear. Its subject matter may be broken down into a small number of categories. There are four surviving mythological scenes; fifteen scenes of rural daily life; ten hunts, or combats between men and animals; thirteen scenes of predation or combat between animals; and fifteen animals alone or in non-violent activities. There are also three scenes which combine two or more of the above elements; eight miscellaneous scenes belonging to none of the categories listed here; and eight scenes too fragmentary to be identified.¹²¹

The categories of subject matter which are absent from the mosaic are as clear-cut as those which are present. Thus, while rural life is clearly within the artist's chosen repertory, urban life is not. This applies not only to human activities but to architecture as well: there are individual buildings such as one might find in a rural or semi-rural setting, but no cityscapes. There are no scenes of marine life, either real or mythological. Despite

the large number of violent themes, there is no indication that the mosaic ever included scenes of combat between human beings. One looks in vain for any hint of eroticism. More surprising, in view of the mosaic's imperial context, is the complete absence of conventional imperial imagery. Brett is correct, too, in pointing out the lack of overt literary, historical, and philosophical themes, though the reclining semi-nude female figure (no. 2, Fig. 13) is surely a personification and hence technically allegorical. It is thus apparent that the heterogeneity of the mosaic is due to variation within a small number of categories rather than to the use of a wide variety of subjects.

Although the limited range of subject matter depicted in the Palace mosaic increases the possibility of finding a unified theme, such a theme if it exists is anything but self-evident. Weitzmann has argued that the mosaic has a consistency derived from its dependence on a single literary text, but he is forced to hypothesize the source, a lost didactic poem similar to Oppian's *Cynegetica*.¹²² However, the existence of distinct but closely related versions of a single theme—the surviving mosaic includes two hare hunts (no. 20, Fig. 23; no. 22) and two boar hunts (nos. 21, 23)—suggests a fundamentally different impulse from the illustrative one, unless of course the variants are meant to represent specific and identifiable episodes from history, literature or myth. This is possible, but unlikely in view of their generic nature and the types of subjects treated in the mosaic as a whole. Of the entire number, it appears that only two illustrate specific stories: Bellerophon and the Chimera (no. 1, Fig. 23) and Samson and the lion (no. 4, Fig. 24).¹²³ The figure of Pan or a satyr carrying a child in no. 3, Figure 25, belongs to the realm of mythology, but lacks reference to a specific narrative.¹²⁴ In addition, there are naturalistic elements

¹²¹ For a list of the scenes assigned to each category, see below, Appendix 1. Certain other distinctions are possible within these categories. Eight of the hunting scenes are "true" hunts, for food, recreation, or public service, while two probably represent *venationes* staged in the arena. Eight of the animal combats are probably intended as depictions of natural events, one is almost certainly a staged combat, and four are emblematic or involve fantastic animals. Altogether, two violent and two non-violent scenes feature fantastic animals, all of them varieties of griffin, but their treatment in terms of style and scale is no different from that of real animals. It is therefore unclear whether the creatures' unreality was significant to the artist's conception, or indeed whether he even thought of them as unreal. The "Great Hunt" mosaic at Piazza Armerina, which depicts in a realistic if compressed manner the capture and transport of beasts for the arena, includes a griffin, and Isidore of Seville's encyclopedic *Etymologiae*, written in the early 7th century, lists the griffin in its account of the habits and habitat of actual creatures (Carandini, *Filosofiana: The Villa of Piazza Armerina*, 103 and fig. 129; Isidore, *Etymologiae* XII.ii.17). Of the miscellaneous scenes, three involve human figures, while five consist of architectural elements sufficiently large, detailed, and isolated to be considered as images in their own right, rather than as parts of a background or setting.

¹²² K. Weitzmann, "The Classical Heritage in the Art of Constantinople," in Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, 126–50, esp. 127–28.

¹²³ Since the head and forequarters of the animal are lost, we cannot be sure whether it is a lion or a dog. The group may represent Heracles and Cerberus, but the absence of Heracles' attributes, the club and lion skin, makes this unlikely. It is also unlikely, though just possible, that the subject is Heracles' combat with the Nemean lion. While this interpretation would explain the absence of the lion skin, Late Antique versions of the theme tend to show Heracles wrestling with the animal face to face, not grasping it around the waist or lifting it off the ground. See *Age of Spirituality*, nos. 139, 140, 206B; also K. Weitzmann, "The Heracles Plaques of St. Peter's Cathedra," *ArtB* 55 (1973), 1–37.

¹²⁴ The figure which I have called a satyr is identified by Brett as Pan carrying the infant Bacchus (Brett, "The Mosaic of the

in the mosaic which run counter to the traditionalism of Late Antique and Byzantine textual illustration.¹²⁵ I do not refer only to the impression of naturalism which the mosaic as a whole conveys. Cutler has shown that the elephants in the Palace mosaic (no. 37, Fig. 26; no. 44) are rendered with an accuracy far beyond any other depiction of these animals in post-classical art.¹²⁶ And in two scenes involving shepherds and their dogs (no. 6, Fig. 27; no. 65, Fig. 1), one dog is shown closely

attending its master, while the other stands guard by the flock. These representations reflect what have been shown to be the two basic behavior patterns in livestock guard dogs.¹²⁷ Such features of the mosaic can only have been derived from close observation of the contemporary world.

Rather than recalling a specific literary text, the agricultural and pastoral elements of the mosaic evoke the world of the Farmer's Law. This document of the rights and conflicts of small landholders dates probably from the late seventh century, and is an essential source for Byzantine social and economic history. Many of its articles have the quality of vignettes, conveying the temper of day-to-day life in the countryside with an almost pictorial vividness:

31. If a tree stands on a lot, if the neighboring lot is a garden and is overshadowed by the tree, the owner of the garden may trim its branches; but if there is no garden, the branches are not to be trimmed.

50. If an ox or an ass in trying to enter a vineyard falls into the ditch of the vineyard or of the garden and is killed, let the owner of the vineyard or garden go harmless.

55. If a man kills a sheepdog and does not make confession but there is an inroad of wild beasts into the sheepfold, and afterwards he who killed the dog is recognized, let him give the whole flock of sheep together with the value of the dog.

81. If a man who is dwelling in a district ascertains that a piece of common ground is suitable for the erection of a mill and appropriates it and then, after the completion of the building, if the commonality of the district complain of the owner of the building as having appropriated common ground, let them give him all the expenditure that is due to him for the completion of the building and let them share it in common with its builder.¹²⁸

Great Palace in Constantinople," p. 35). Brett goes on to identify the elephant and the woman carrying a ewer as elements in a Bacchic procession. Hiller accepts this identification without question, and it plays a central role in his interpretation of the mosaic ("Divino sensu agnoscere," 280–83). Cutler is rightly much more cautious, admitting only that "the satyr and the fragmentary elephant behind him draw upon the sort of Dionysiac frieze which occurs frequently on many sarcophagi of the late second and third centuries after Christ" ("The Elephants of the Great Palace Mosaic," 125). For the combination of an elephant and a male figure carrying a child, see F. Matz, *Die dionysischen Sarkophage*, II (Berlin 1968), no. 129, pl. 144. The figure, while perhaps identifiable as a satyr, is fully human in form. Since the woman holding a ewer plays no part in this or other similar compositions, there is no basis for Hiller's assumption that the ewer must contain wine. Even if certain figures in the Palace mosaic were derived from a Bacchic procession, it is unlikely, given the discontinuous composition of the mosaic, that they were still meant explicitly to depict such a scene. The identification of the child in the Palace mosaic as Bacchus was called into question even before the publication of Brett's article, in a letter from Fritz Saxl to Dr. David Russell, dated September 9, 1942. I am grateful to the Walker Trust for permission to examine this and other documents pertaining to the Palace excavation.

¹²⁵ On this traditionalism see K. Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex* (Princeton, 1970), esp. 154–81.

¹²⁶ "Not one elephant, in east or west, approaches in verisimilitude either the Indian or the African [elephant] represented in the [Palace] pavement" (Cutler, "The Elephants of the Great Palace Mosaic," 126). Yet in the preceding paragraph, Cutler uses certain lapses of naturalism in the Indian elephant as evidence that it "was not drawn from life or life-like art" (p. 126)! This apparent contradiction is perhaps to be explained by Cutler's interest in ways of establishing the origins of the various images that comprise the mosaic. Speaking of the "slightly different degree of naturalism" in the representation of African and Indian elephants in the Palace mosaic, he concludes that "it would be difficult to find more compelling reasons to suppose that the pavement is an assemblage of motifs of different character and date" (p. 126). His conclusion, bolstered by evidence other than that of the elephants themselves, is that the African elephant is derived from a Hellenistic model, the Indian one from a work of the early Imperial period (p. 129). Although I agree in principle with Cutler's method, I would question whether the differences of naturalism that he cites are enough to establish that the two elephants are based on models of different periods, or even that they were not drawn from life, let alone "life-like art." (On the force of preconception, and its tendency to prevail even in the face of direct observation, see E. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* [New York, 1960], 78–82.) In an important sense, however, the issue of copying vs. life-drawing is irrelevant to the present study. Whatever the immediate source, the artist or artists responsible for the two elephants made a

leap to naturalism that is radical by any standard of Late Antique art. Whether the leap was motivated primarily by a love of naturalism for its own sake, or by an interest in historic styles, is and will probably remain a matter of personal judgment.

Cutler documents the presence of elephants in Constantinople as late as the reign of Justinian (p. 126 note 10). In view of my arguments to follow, it is important that Nicephorus records the inclusion of four elephants in the triumphal procession of Emperor Heraclius in 628: Nicephorus, *Historia Syntomos* (Leipzig, 1880), p. 22, lines 20–23.

¹²⁷ R. Coppinger, J. Lorenz, J. Glendinning, and P. Pinardi, "Attentiveness of Guarding Dogs for Reducing Predation on Domestic Sheep," *Journal of Range Management* 36, 3 (1983), 275–79.

¹²⁸ Translation from W. Ashburner, "The Farmer's Law," *JHS* 30 (1910), 85–108; 32 (1912), 65–95. On the literature concerning the Farmer's Law and the problem of its date, see G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 82 note 3; also P. Lemerle, "Esquisse pour une histoire agraire de Byzance," *RH* 219, 1 (1958), 49 ff.

At first glance the mosaic seems to present a very similar picture, though its realism is not surprisingly tempered by the omission of precisely that picaresque aspect of rural life—theft, vandalism or negligence, and its punishment—which is the *raison d'être* of a legal code. There is reason to believe, however, that the artist's reliance on direct observation was not so extensive as a few specific instances might suggest. Many apparently naturalistic images, in every category, can be shown to derive from a repertory of themes and image types going back to earlier periods of Roman art. Thus there is a significant resemblance between the combat of two spearmen with a tiger (no. 28, Figs. 2 and 28) and a painting from Leptis Magna (Fig. 77);¹²⁹ between the seated fisherman (no. 12, Fig. 29) and a mosaic from Leptis (Fig. 78);¹³⁰ or, at a slightly greater remove, between the circus parody with boys racing with hoops (no. 29) and humorous depictions of chariot races from Rome and Piazza Armerina.¹³¹ On a more general level, the scenes of predation and combat between animals belong to an old and well-established tradition in Greco-Roman art.

Perhaps most surprising to a modern viewer is the importance of convention in the depiction of rural life: farming, herding, small-game hunting. These images directly reflect the world of everyday experience, and would be expected to show the clearest signs of direct observation. Yet while we have seen that this is sometimes true for details, generically these images are largely conventional, going back to such works as the third-century agricultural mosaic from Cherrchell and the scenes of life on a large estate pictured in the fourth-century mosaic of Dominus Julius from Carthage (Fig. 56).¹³² It would be a mistake, however, to see the Palace mosaic in terms of a dichotomy between convention and a hypothetical "pure" naturalism. Insofar as it does rely on direct observation, the mosaic does not reject convention, but rather suggests a willingness to innovate within a conventional framework.

The combination of convention and experience on which the artist of the Palace mosaic could draw would certainly have allowed him to represent the

darker side of rural life had he chosen to do so. The comparison between the mosaic and the Farmer's Law is ultimately significant not because it implies any direct connection between these two documents of Byzantine culture, but because it makes clear the nature and extent of the gap between a truly realistic view of peasant life and the view which the artist of the Palace mosaic chose to present. As I have noted, it is hardly surprising that the rural mishaps, crimes, and punishments detailed in the Farmer's Law are missing from the imperial mosaic. Indeed, they are conspicuous by their absence in the larger tradition of decorative works depicting the lives and labors of the peasantry—presumably for reasons of emotional security, and not from any loathing of violence! The crucial question nevertheless arises: was the artist's choice of rural themes dictated solely by convention, or is it an inseparable part of the meaning of the mosaic as a whole? To find an answer, we must examine not only the rural themes themselves but their relation to the other categories of subject matter that make up the Palace mosaic.

By no means every rural scene is tranquil or idyllic. In no. 65, Figure 1 a wolf makes off with a kid despite the dog which guards the rest of the flock; in no. 67, Figures 30 and 31 a shepherd carries a lamb to safety while a wolf devours a sheep; and in no. 35, Figure 20 a lamb or kid is eaten by a bear. No. 66, Figure 17 shows a man fleeing from a bear, while its mate climbs a tree to throw down fruit for two cubs. While the scene has a comic dimension, and shows a sympathetic interest in the activities of animals (though not a wholly naturalistic one: male bears are likely to kill their cubs if not driven off by the female), there is no ignoring the man's sense of shock and desperate flight. However, these scenes are a minority; the greater number convey a very different vision of peasant life.

In the majority of rural scenes the artist has created a world of unending bountiful summer in which subsistence is indistinguishable from recreation. A herdsman, his dog crouched at his feet, plays the lute while two horses, one with a nursing foal, graze nearby (no. 6, Fig. 27). Another herdsman milks goats as a boy holds a large jar for the milk (no. 7, Color pl. D). A fisherman sits contentedly on a rock, dabbling his feet in the water as he holds up his catch (no. 12, Fig. 29). A man gives two boys a ride on a camel (no. 18, Fig. 19 and Color pl. C). A woman sits beneath a tree, nursing a baby (no. 11, Figs. 3, 32). A trained monkey har-

¹²⁹ J. B. Ward-Perkins and J. M. C. Toynbee, "The Hunting Baths at Lepcis Magna," *Archaeologia* 93 (1949), 165–95, pl. 43a.

¹³⁰ G. Guidi, "La villa del Nilo," *AfrIt* 5 (1933), 1–56.

¹³¹ Painting in Rome (Vatican Library): M. Borda, *La pittura romana* (Milan, 1958), 275; Piazza Armerina: Carandini, *Filosofiana*, 282. See also Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 105–7.

¹³² See above, note 62.

vests dates (no. 45, Fig. 33). Toilsome manual labor is represented only by the scene of two peasants hoeing (no. 19, Fig. 34), hunting is a ritualized amusement, and disaster is of the slapstick variety, as when a muleteer is kicked by his overloaded animal (no. 17, Fig. 35).

The reason for this idealized picture of rural life becomes clear when we examine it in relation to the other themes depicted in the mosaic. This examination reveals a startling fact: there are only three basic categories of subject matter in the mosaic, and every identifiable scene belongs to at least one of them. The categories are *rural or idyllic life*, *animal violence*, and *protection*. From the way in which these categories are related, it is possible to deduce the meaning of the mosaic as a whole. The artist has created an analogue of human society and its relation to the natural world.¹³³ In so doing, he has also given concrete form to certain of the social and political ideals that underlie the Byzantine imperial order. The scenes whose idealized character I have just noted belong exclusively to the first category of imagery. Although they are not formally distinct from the other images in the mosaic, they provide a starting point for the interpretation of the work as a whole, since it is only in relation to them that the other types of imagery take on a consistent meaning.

It is a convention, even a cliché, of Greco-Roman culture that a simple rural life is morally superior to a complex urban one, providing all that is necessary for human well-being without the pressures, distractions, and corrupting influences of the city.¹³⁴ In these terms the Palace mosaic offers a picture of humanity at its best, but also, necessarily, at its most innocent. The viewer is in a position to recognize, as the dwellers in the idyll scarcely do, that their lives are overshadowed by the threat of violence and disruption. In a few scenes to which I have already called attention, the danger is depicted literally, as the encroachment of predatory animals transforms an idyllic world into a sternly realistic one. For the most part, however, the threat of violence is conveyed symbolically, by the composition of the mosaic as a whole. There is no peaceful or idyllic scene near which we do not find a scene of violence, generally involving animals as predators and prey. The agents of violence

range from the largest, most dramatically dangerous animals to the smaller hawk, mongoose, and shrike (nos. 29, 32, and 36).¹³⁵ Their omnipresence defines the underlying realism, even pessimism, of the mosaic's world, and sets it in sharp and ironic contrast to the blissful ignorance of most of the human beings who seem content to dwell there.

An appreciation of this rather heavy irony is essential to the interpretation of the mosaic, but the work as a whole is far more complex than the juxtaposition of idyllic and violent imagery would in itself suggest. Many scenes belong to neither of these categories, but embody protection against violence, in the same visual and symbolic sense in which violence threatens idyllic life. The isolated images of soldiers (no. 58, Fig. 36; no. 59, Fig. 37) belong to this category, but its most obvious representatives are the two recognizable heroes, Bellerophon and Samson, shown killing a monster and a dangerous wild animal respectively (nos. 1, 4).¹³⁶ Other hunters belong to the world of everyday life rather than legend, but several of them convey a similar message of protection; their quarry include the leopard (no. 25, Fig. 38) and the notoriously destructive wild boar (nos. 21, 23). The group of two spearmen confronting a tiger (no. 28, Fig. 28) probably represents a staged combat in the arena. The relation of such combats to the idea of protection is more complex, but clear, based on the idea that the spectacle of the games, and the fights between men and beasts of which they consist, embody and symbolize the triumph of civilization over nature.¹³⁷

One might expect to see the interplay of idyllic

¹³⁵ For a remarkably similar spectrum of violence extending up and down the scale of animal life, and coexisting with a variety of human activities, cf. a 4th-century B.C. gold pectoral, made in Greece for the Scythian market, found at Ordzhonikidze and now in the Kiev Historical Museum. See *From the Lands of the Scythians*, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1975), no. 171.

¹³⁶ In pagan thought, Bellerophon's protective character goes beyond that of the generic monster-slayer: a *scholion* on Hesiod's *Theogony* identifies the Chimera with winter and Pegasus with the sun, making the hero a symbol of seasonal renewal. See M. Simon, "Bellérophon chrétien," in *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'épigraphie, et d'histoire offertes à Jérôme Carcopino* (Paris, 1966), 889–904, esp. 892. Simon's study focuses on the well-known pavement from Hinton-St. Mary, now in the British Museum, which depicts Bellerophon killing the Chimera in close proximity to images of Christ and the seasons. Although Simon concedes a lack of textual evidence for Christian interpretations of the Bellerophon myth, the theme of the mosaic is clear in the light of the *scholion*. On Bellerophon see also Hiller, "Divino sensu agnoscere," 278–80.

¹³⁷ A fascinating if tantalizingly brief anticipation of this reading appears in A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography* (Princeton,

¹³³ For earlier versions of this theme in floor mosaics, see A. Grabar, "Recherches sur les sources juives," II.

¹³⁴ The best-known and most complex statement of this view is Vergil's *Georgics*, to be discussed below. For an ironic variant, see Horace's second *Epode*.

life, violence, and protection optimistically resolved, in a progression from imminent violence to safety and stability. In fact, there is nothing in the mosaic's repertory of images to suggest such a progression. The mosaic is of course very fragmentary. Nevertheless, the composition as it survives, governed only by the simplest of register structures, suggests neither a central focus nor a spatial progression capable of enforcing a symbolic order on its imagery. In other words, there is no visual indication that the artist intended to show a decisive resolution. The three elements of the program are held in endless tension tinged with unpredictability. On both the visual and the symbolic level, violence is everywhere. Order and chaos are not diametrically opposed, but interpenetrate, and only unceasing vigilance can keep the tenuous lines that separate them from dissolving.

The virtual inseparability of violence and everyday life is a theme which the Palace mosaic explores in some depth, especially as it relates to the concepts of power and order. I have already noted that nos. 65–67 depict in literal terms the encroachment of violence on the idyllic world. Nos. 65 and 67 also incorporate the idea of protection, in the functions of the guard dog and the shepherd respectively. These figures are of particular interest because of the ambivalent role assigned to the protectors. In no. 65 the dog's presence allows the flock of goats to graze peacefully, but does not prevent a wolf from carrying away a kid.¹³⁸ The shepherd in no. 67 rescues a lamb, but a wolf kills and eats a sheep from the same flock. In both instances violence, or the threat of violence, calls forth protective figures from within the idyllic world itself, but the safety they afford is not complete, and is offset by a sense of loss.¹³⁹

A different sort of ambivalence surrounds the majority of the protective figures, a consequence of the very qualities which allow them to function effectively as protectors. Heroes, soldiers, hunters, and gladiators stand between the fragile order of unspoiled human life and the violent chaos of na-

ture in more than one sense, for they inhabit their own world of violence, which sets them apart from the innocent world they are called on symbolically to protect. Most problematic in this respect are the protectors who themselves belong to the animal world. One example is the deer in combat with a snake (no. 38, Fig. 39). It was a widely held Late Antique belief that deer hunt and kill snakes, but the theme was allegorized either as Christ triumphing over Satan or as the soul in its struggle with evil.¹⁴⁰ The combat of an eagle and a snake (no. 40, Fig. 40) seems also to have been primarily a symbol of the fight between good and evil, specifically between Christ and Satan.¹⁴¹ Finally, there is the image of a griffin eating a lizard (no. 39, Fig. 21). The implications of the theme have not been systematically explored, but may be inferred from the association of the griffin with Apollo and the likelihood that as early as the fourth century B.C. the lizard stood for the serpent Python which Apollo killed.¹⁴² The image in the Palace mosaic thus represents the civilizing, solar deity Apollo triumphing over the force of darkness, but the pagan theme is transmuted into a symbolic animal form which would be acceptable to a Christian society.

Even if we assume that the symbolic meaning of these images was immediately recognized, on the literal level their violence is indistinguishable from that of the other animal combats depicted in the mosaic. They represent a blurring of boundaries, an awareness that stability requires compromise with the very forces that threaten it. This awareness profoundly alters the tone of the mosaic as a whole. Its message is no longer heroically optimistic but bitterly practical. Given the context of the mosaic, there can be no doubt that this message

1968), 53. For a further discussion of the symbolism of the Roman games, see below, Appendix 2. The fact that the tiger in no. 27 has apparently overwhelmed its human opponent complicates my interpretation.

¹³⁸ I have been unable to find either a prototype or an explanation for the wolf using its tail to hold (or perhaps conceal?) its prey. The motif has no biological basis and presumably originates in contemporary folklore.

¹³⁹ For a different reading of these scenes, see Hiller, "Divino sensu agnoscere," 296–98.

¹⁴⁰ H.-C. Puech, "Le cerf et le serpent. Note sur le symbolisme de la mosaïque découverte au Baptistère de l'Henchir Messaouda," *CahArch* 4 (1949), 17–60; R. Ettinghausen, "The 'Snake-Eating Stag' in the East," *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.* (Princeton, 1955), 272–86 (repr. in Ettinghausen, *Islamic Art and Archaeology: Collected Papers* [Berlin, 1984], 674–92); Hiller, "Divino sensu agnoscere," 284 ff.

¹⁴¹ R. Wittkower, "Eagle and Serpent," *JWarb* 2 (1938–39), 293–325.

¹⁴² For Apollo with griffins see E. Simon, "Zur Bedeutung des Greifen in der Kunst der Kaiserzeit," *Latomus* 21, 4 (1962), 749–80, esp. 763–67; Hiller, "Divino sensu agnoscere," 288–91; *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II.2 (Zurich-Munich, 1984), 212, nos. 363 and 364; 213, no. 367; 298, no. 26. For the iconography of Apollo Sauroktonos, and the use of the lizard as a substitute for Python, see *Lexicon*, II.1, p. 199. My interpretation of the griffin in the Palace mosaic leaves unanswered the question: why is the creature depicted in female form?

was political in its import. Yet there is one crucial way in which the Palace mosaic differs from the great body of political art which the Roman and Byzantine world produced. It uses symbolism to undercut symbolism, to show that the mystique of power surrounding the emperor is meaningless without the exercise of power in reality, that there are no simple answers and perhaps no final victory. The Palace mosaic is political art that transcends propaganda: it is an uncompromising reminder of the basis of civilization and the responsibilities of imperial rule.

Describing the world of the fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus, Erich Auerbach speaks of the "somber and pathetic determination to accomplish an ever more difficult, ever more desperate task: to protect the Empire, threatened from without and crumbling from within. This determination gives the strongest among the actors . . . a rigid, convulsive superhumanity with no possibility of relaxation. . . ." ¹⁴³ Like Auerbach's formulation, the message of the mosaic may be applied with equal aptness to any period of Late Roman history. But if there is a single time, a single set of events, to which the mosaic is particularly applicable, it is the reign of Heraclius. In general terms, his desperate struggle against an omnipresent threat to the very fabric of Byzantine civilization finds a remarkable echo in the structure which our inquiry has revealed in the Palace mosaic. It is the precise circumstances of Heraclius' reign, however, which bear most closely on that inquiry, and which hold out the best hope for further interpretation of the mosaic. ¹⁴⁴

To what extent can the modes of symbolic expression found in the Palace mosaic be regarded as typical of Heraclius' reign? Few works of art sur-

vive from the first half of the seventh century, and it is not surprising that the expressive concerns of the period are little understood. ¹⁴⁵ In a study of the David plates, works dated conclusively to the reign of Heraclius and widely recognized as a symbolic representation of his career, I have argued that the plates as a group were intended to express the interdependence of heroic action and the institutional stability of ceremony. ¹⁴⁶ This message is not so very different in character from that which we have found in the Palace mosaic. Further, by combining classical style and biblical theme, the David plates endow Heraclius with the authority of both classical and biblical traditions, linking him on the most fundamental level to the stability of the empire, which drew its strength from both sources. The Palace mosaic is less overtly "learned," less dependent on specific allusion, but displays, as we shall see, a depth of learning and insight in comparison to which the program of the David plates seems stilted and mechanical.

To understand the mosaic fully, we must explore its connection with a much earlier work in which agriculture also functions as a political metaphor: Vergil's *Georgics*, completed in 29 B.C. under Emperor Augustus. ¹⁴⁷ Because the poem takes the form of a treatise on agriculture, it is an obvious place to look for images that might have served, at least in part, as models for the Palace mosaic. The search would be vain; in no detail, no verbal "picture," do the rural labors described by Vergil match those which the Byzantine artist chose to depict. Yet on another level, that of political ideology, the correspondence between the two works is so close as to leave little doubt that the artist of the Palace mosaic not only knew Vergil's poem but drew much of his inspiration from it.

The Byzantine use of Augustan political thought

¹⁴³ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 1953), 56.

¹⁴⁴ The association of the Palace mosaic with Heraclius would help to explain one of the peculiarities of its subject matter. I have already noted that, despite its apparent diversity, the mosaic includes no scenes of marine life. The most striking detail of Heraclius' personality that has come down to us is his fear of water; in 638 he could cross the Bosphorus only on a bridge of boats camouflaged to look like dry land (Nicephorus, *Historia Syntomos*, pp. 25–26). Nothing is more reasonable than that an emperor who felt such fear should have wished to avoid even the illusion of "walking on water," and have restricted the decoration of his palace accordingly! There is a problem in reconciling Heraclius' fear of water with the fact that he led a naval expedition to Constantinople in 610. We must assume that the phobia was tolerable at the beginning of his career, but became progressively worse as the years went by. I shall argue that the Palace mosaic dates from ca. 630, i.e., shortly after Heraclius' great victories, and about twenty years after his accession.

¹⁴⁵ Kitzinger, "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm" remains the classic discussion of the art of the period, but its emphasis is on stylistic development and the dating of individual works, not on the reign of Heraclius per se or on such problems as the relation of composition and iconology. Wright, "The Shape of the Seventh Century in Byzantine Art" is more concerned with defining a Heraclian "period style," but leaves open many questions of dating and does not attempt to deal with iconology.

¹⁴⁶ J. Trilling, "Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court: A Literary Approach to the David Plates," *Byzantion* 48 (1978), 249–63. For a different reading of the David plates, see S. Spain Alexander, "Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology, and the David Plates," *Speculum* 52 (1977), 217–37.

¹⁴⁷ The most comprehensive literary studies of the *Georgics*, and those which take fullest account of the poem's political implications, are M. Putnam, *Virgil's Poem of the Earth* (Princeton, 1979), and G. B. Miles, *Virgil's Georgics* (Berkeley, 1980).

should not in itself be especially surprising. From the time of Eusebius onward, Augustus was given a special place in Christian thought as the instrument of God's will, the ruler whose establishment of a far-flung yet peaceful empire made possible the spread of Christianity.¹⁴⁸ More important for our study, the late seventh-century chronicle of John of Nikiu recounts that when Heraclius arrived at Constantinople in 610 to claim the throne, his North African followers proclaimed, "This emperor Heraclius will be like Augustus."¹⁴⁹ It is the continuing influence of Vergil's own work which raises questions for which only tentative answers as yet exist. Latin was known and used in Constantinople through the sixth century, not only in legal and official spheres but in literary ones as well.¹⁵⁰ It is particularly telling that as late as 566 Corippus' panegyric on Justin II was written in Latin. As Barry Baldwin puts it, "there is no point in writing, of all things, encomia, if no one can read them."¹⁵¹ It is also clear, however, that the early seventh century was a watershed in the relation of Byzantine society to the Latin language, and that the reign of Heraclius, in particular, saw the triumph of Greek even in the official contexts previously reserved for Latin.¹⁵² As for knowledge of Vergil's own work in the Byzantine world, there is a thread of documentation, albeit a thin one, extending as far as the late sixth century, but apparently no further.¹⁵³

It may of course be a mistake to see the problem

¹⁴⁸ F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy* (Washington, D.C., 1966), II, 604, 614–15, 681, 697, 725; Hiller, "Divino sensu agnoscere," 305.

¹⁴⁹ H. Zotenberg, *Chronique de Jean Evêque de Nikiu. Notices et extraits des MSS. de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 24, 1 (1883), 552.

¹⁵⁰ G. Dagron, "Aux origines de la civilisation byzantine: Langue de culture et langue d'état," *RH* 241 (1969), 23–56; Averil Cameron, "A Nativity Poem of the Sixth Century A.D.," *CPh* 79 (1979), 222–32 (repr. in Cameron, *Continuity and Change in Sixth Century Byzantium* [London, 1981]); M. Gigante, "Il latino a bisanzio," in Gigante, *Scritti sulla civiltà letteraria bizantina* (Naples, 1981), 65–104; B. Baldwin, "Vergil in Byzantium," *AntAb* 28 (1982), 81–93.

¹⁵¹ Baldwin, "Vergil in Byzantium," 89. See also Cameron, "A Nativity Poem"; and Cameron, ed. and trans., *Flavius Cresconius Corippus: In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris* (London, 1976).

¹⁵² Dagron, "Aux origines de la civilisation byzantine." We should not, however, assume that the triumph of Greek was absolute. The autobiography of Ananias of Shirak recounts the career of the philosopher Tychikos, who studied in a number of cities, including a year in Rome, before establishing himself as a teacher in his home city of Trebizond during the reign of Heraclius (P. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism* [Canberra, 1986], 92–93). To profit from his stay in Rome, Tychikos must already have known Latin, or have set himself to learn it. We may draw a similar conclusion for the career of Theodore of Tarsus, appointed archbishop of Canterbury in 668–669 (*ibid.*, 4).

¹⁵³ Baldwin, "Vergil in Byzantium." Averil Cameron takes for granted an extensive Vergilian influence on Corippus (Intro-

ducing in terms of the state of Latin learning in seventh-century Constantinople. The creator of the Palace mosaic may have read the *Georgics* in translation: there are tantalizing references to a Greek version of the poem, though its date and readership are unknown.¹⁵⁴ A second possibility is that the mosaic was conceived by a Latin speaker from the western part of the empire, who came to Constantinople in Heraclius' entourage. Although Heraclius and his family were native speakers of Greek, as the son of the exarch of Carthage the future emperor spent at least eight years of his young manhood in a Latin-speaking region.¹⁵⁵ The passage from John of Nikiu, cited above, clearly links the comparison of Heraclius and Augustus with the emperor's North African background. We may safely assume that the comparison was officially sanctioned, the popular reflection of a more sophisticated ideological current within Heraclius' following. If the Augustan connection was a theme in Heraclius' bid for power, nothing is more likely than that the most learned of Heraclius' Latin-speaking followers should have evoked Vergil, the Augustan author par excellence, in support of their victorious emperor.

duction to Corippus: *In laudem Iustini*, 8; for a full catalogue of Corippus' borrowings, cf. M. Manitius, "Zu spätlateinischen Dichtern," *Zeitschrift für die österreichischen Gymnasien* 37 [1886], 81 ff). The Byzantine collection of agricultural writings known as the *Geoponica*, based largely on a 6th-century compilation, includes two references to the *Georgics*, but neither is of a sort to suggest extensive knowledge of the text. See R. H. Rogers, "Varro and Virgil in the *Geoponica*," *GRBS* 19 (1978), 277–85.

¹⁵⁴ Baldwin, "Vergil in Byzantium," 81.

¹⁵⁵ On Heraclius' North African background and its importance for his personal and political life, see C. Diehl, *L'Afrique byzantine* (Paris, 1896), 479–80, 517–23. According to Averil Cameron, "the first half of the seventh century was to see a vigorous intellectual activity in Africa, all of it conducted in Greek" ("Byzantine Africa: The Literary Evidence," 53; italics mine). Cameron refers to the controversies surrounding two refugees from the upheavals in the east, Maximus Confessor and Sophronius, whose careers involved them in religious politics on the highest levels of the empire. Since neither arrived in Africa until Heraclius' rule in Constantinople was well established, the resurgence of interest in Greek which they stimulated can have no effect on the emperor's own background or that of his early associates. For the tenacity of Latin in North African Christian inscriptions, even after the Arab conquest, see W. Seston, "Sur les derniers temps du christianisme en Afrique," *Mélanges* 53 (1936), 101–24. Of particular importance is a Christian epitaph from Hippo, in the form of a crude but recognizable Vergilian pastiche. Henri Marrou attributes this inscription to the late 6th or early 7th century ("Epitaphe chrétienne d'Hippone à reminiscences virgiliennes," *Libya* 1 [1953], 215–30; repr. in Marrou, *Christiana Tempora* [Rome, 1978], 129–44). Its provenance and poor technical and literary quality suggest that familiarity with Vergil's work was confined neither to Carthage nor to a tiny conservative elite.

The most basic link between the poem and the mosaic is that both present rural life as essentially idyllic, but at the same time as beset by natural dangers. In the mosaic, as we have seen, these are represented by the violence of the animal kingdom. In the poem the most evident peril is from sudden storms (I.311 ff), a less tangible menace, seen more explicitly as part of the cycle of nature, yet requiring the same consistent vigilance. The connection between agricultural and political concerns is made clear in I.461 ff, as a discussion of the need to observe nature for signs of impending disaster gives way to an account of the anomalies and portents supposed to have accompanied Caesar's death, heralding civil and foreign war and leading in turn to an appeal to Augustus to bring peace.

Vergil's poem has a mythological basis in the transition from the golden age of Saturn, in which an unthreatening nature offered food to human hands without need of cultivation, to the present rule of Jupiter, in which human life is fraught with toil and risk.¹⁵⁶ It is Jupiter, the poet explains, who choked off the earth's previous abundance, forcing men to learn new skills through hardship (I.121 ff). The vision of the golden age lingers in ironic contrast to Vergil's description of the actual difficulties of agricultural life, culminating in a vision of the collapse to which human enterprise is doomed without constant effort: "sic omnia fati/ In peius ruere ac retro sublapsa referri." It is the same message we have read in the Palace mosaic.

In the final eighty-four lines of Book II, Vergil expounds the fundamental blessing of the simple life: ease of subsistence, far from conflict. There is no luxury, but there is no deception either, and the beauty of the natural setting and its conduciveness to virtue make up for the lack of physical possessions (II.458–474). There is nothing remarkable in this idealized picture of rural life, but the ideological conceit which follows from it is complex and rich in implication for our study. In lines 490 ff, Vergil hails the man who, by learning the laws of nature as they apply to farming, has reached a deeper understanding of the working of the universe. The key lines here are 490 and 493: "Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas . . . Fortunatus et ille, deos qui novit agrestis." Everything in the

poem up to this point has laid the ground for the parallelism, almost the equivalence, of these two lines. To learn the discipline of farming is to understand the causes of things, to be philosophically enlightened and thus free from fear, from the vicissitudes of fortune and the excesses of desire which beset the world, and the resulting follies and disasters so vividly detailed in lines 495–512. In contrast, lines 513–531 set forth the pleasures of industrious rural life. The passage begins with what seems a fair balance: incessant work, but an ample return in crops and livestock (lines 516–518). In the following lines, however, the emphasis shifts decisively from work to ease; so decisively, indeed, that Vergil seems to have forgotten his earlier, all too realistic picture of the farmer's life. The new picture which he paints recalls instead the effortless abundance of the golden age, and the likeness is made explicit in lines 536–540.

This movement from the real to the ideal should not be surprising, since Vergil is no longer writing about farming, but about a harmonious state of mind for which farming has become a metaphor.¹⁵⁷ Simultaneously, however, a very different process is at work, one which bears closely upon the Palace mosaic. Its basis is not philosophical but political. To appreciate Vergil's political orientation, we need only turn from the *Georgics* to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the oldest surviving agricultural poem in the Greco-Roman tradition and Vergil's main source of inspiration in that genre. Hesiod says less than Vergil about the physical hazards which beset the farmer, but where Vergil finds in the farmer's life an ambivalent image of the human condition, the image Hesiod projects is a deeply pessimistic one. Vergil's farmer must live with the fear of natural disasters, but Hesiod's must thread a maze of superstitious taboos, in a world which is not just unforgiving but charged with divine malevolence. Not only is the extent of our decline from the golden age more explicit in Hesiod, but the earlier poet holds out no vision of redemption or renewal, in either personal or political terms. The reward of hard work is prosperity for the individual household, not a transformation or transfiguration of society, and rulers are seen not as bringers of peace but as oppressors whose harshness is only kept in check by the threat of divine punishment.

¹⁵⁶ Putnam, *Virgil's Poem of the Earth*, 33 ff. On the idea of the golden age in Greek and Roman literature, see A. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1935), and P. A. Johnston, *Virgil's Agricultural Golden Age* (Leiden, 1980).

¹⁵⁷ For a far more explicit (and far less subtle) use of farming as a metaphor for mental discipline, cf. Philo's treatise "On Husbandry," ed. and trans. F. M. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Loeb Classical Library, Philo*, III (London-New York 1930).

This brief comparison makes it clear that poetic treatments even of such a timeless theme as farming may reflect fundamental changes in social and political outlook. Specifically, Vergil's poem presupposes a centralized empire with an ideology of benevolent absolutism. Rural life, as Vergil portrays it in this context, leads to personal fulfillment and economic prosperity, but its importance goes much further than this. It is stable and peaceful, immune to the glamour of power, and capable of endless self-renewal through work and harmony with nature. Thus not only is farming the basis of a prosperous and lasting empire, but the creation and protection of a farm economy is a justification of the empire's existence. Neither can survive alone; together they promise peace, prosperity, and the betterment of the human condition, culminating in a restoration of the golden age.

The Palace mosaic echoes the brilliantly seductive imperial propaganda of the *Georgics*. Ideologically, the two works are virtually identical, which suggests an explanation for one of the more puzzling aspects of the mosaic, the combination of harsh realism and naiveté in its depiction of rural life. Like the poem, the mosaic unites farming itself and the paradisiacal state which the devoted farmer's life supposedly confers. However, the mosaic makes plain the political reality at which Vergil only hints: a society operating on the principles of the golden age is acutely vulnerable. Vergil proposes an almost mystical symbiosis of emperor and peasantry, but for the Byzantine artist the focus of the relationship has shifted to the fragility of that symbiosis, and the need to defend it by force of arms. The atmosphere of the mosaic is reminiscent not of Vergil's vision of a restored golden age, but of a passage noted earlier (I.121 ff) which describes the efforts involved in making the best of a fallen world.

The close connection with Vergil's text gives the Palace mosaic a resonance, a sense of affinity with the Roman past, which would have been lost on viewers who did not know the *Georgics* well. The identification of Heraclius with Augustus, in particular, depends on an awareness that the mosaic is a response to Vergil's poem. Despite their differences of emphasis, both the *Georgics* and the Palace mosaic celebrate the imposition of peace—or at least of stability—and the reintegration of dangerously weakened societies. The mosaic lacks the poem's unmistakable references to *civil* war, but its viewers would certainly have remembered the difficult years under Phocas, and have been ready to

accept the parallel between Heraclius and Augustus as conquerors of internal as well as external foes.¹⁵⁸ On a more specific level, Book III, lines 16–39 describe an imaginary temple to Augustus.¹⁵⁹ The victories which it commemorates are those which Augustus actually celebrated in his triple triumph of 29 B.C.: over barbarian tribes in western Europe, over Antony at Actium, and over Egypt, which was thus incorporated into the empire. Vergil also alludes to an anticipated victory over the Parthians. This vision of a comprehensive triumph over enemies to the east and west corresponds in the highest degree to Heraclius' own military exploits. Indeed, this and another passage from the *Georgics*, by their relevance both to the Palace mosaic and to the events of Heraclius' reign, come closer than any other written documents to establishing the mosaic's date and historical setting. The last eight lines of Vergil's poem (IV.559 ff), a sort of epilogue, begin as follows:

Haec super arborum cultu pecorumque cane-
bam
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
fulminat Euphraten bello victorque volentis
per populos dat iura viamque adfectat Olympo.

These lines refer to Augustus' triumphal progress of 30–29 B.C. through the eastern lands of the empire. Read in a Heraclian context, however, they cannot fail to evoke the later emperor's Persian campaign and climactic victory near Nineveh (actually on the Tigris).¹⁶⁰ This parallel suggests that the Palace mosaic was conceived as a counterpart to the *Georgics* in occasion as well as theme, and created to honor Heraclius on his return to Constantinople in 628. The lines just quoted would thus have functioned as a kind of invisible colophon to the Palace mosaic, understood perhaps by only a small proportion of the emperor's court. To this elite group, however, they would have conveyed a deeper significance, not only likening Heraclius to Augustus but equating his victory and triumphant return with the establishment of just rule in the East by the first Roman emperor.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ On the relation of the *Georgics* to the Roman civil war, see Miles, *Virgil's Georgics*, passim; pp. 65 ff describe the upheavals of the period in terms that are particularly evocative of the reign of Phocas.

¹⁵⁹ On this passage see Miles, *Virgil's Georgics*, 170–71.

¹⁶⁰ Significantly, not only Vergil but Augustus himself saw the eastern progress in quasi-military rather than just political terms: the coin issued to commemorate the event bears the legend ASIA RECEPTA. See C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy* (London, 1951), 29–31.

¹⁶¹ The Vergilian undercurrent in the Palace mosaic may not

Although the full significance of the Palace mosaic cannot have been appreciated without a knowledge of the *Georgics*, we should remember that the mosaic is not a commentary but an immensely sophisticated visual response to Vergil's poem. As such, it is and was capable of being enjoyed and interpreted on many levels. We have seen that even without the Vergilian connection, the Palace mosaic comprises both a set of entertaining, apparently unrelated vignettes, and a meditation on the fragility of civilization and the responsibilities of power. A further level of meaning is suggested by passages from the work of George of Pisidia, court poet under Heraclius. George's best-known works are the "epic panegyrics" in which he recounts and celebrates the emperor's military exploits.¹⁶² His poems on non-historical themes, such as the creation of the world (the *Hexaemeron*) and the vanity of life, have received less attention from modern scholars, but it

have been the only implicit, even esoteric attempt by Heraclius or his court to link that emperor to a specifically Roman heroic past. Contemporary sources record that in his decisive battle with the Persians, Heraclius killed the Persian general Razatis (or Rizatis) in single combat, and beheaded him (for a reconstruction of the battle, see Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, I, 210–13). The parallel with the story of David and Goliath was not lost on Heraclius' followers, and it almost certainly inspired the largest of the David plates, in which the beheading of Goliath figures prominently in the exergue. (See S. H. Wander, "The Cyprus Plates and the Chronicle of Fredegar," *DOP* 29, [1975], 345–46. In my article "Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court" I argued that the plates were made near the beginning of Heraclius' reign, but I am now prepared to accept the later date which the connection with the combat with Razatis implies.) The impact of the biblical type would have been immediate and widespread, but there is another level of typology at work here. By killing the enemy commander, Heraclius won the rarest of Roman military honors, the *spolia opima*, which had been won only three times before in all of Roman history. Although the sources deal with the event in biblical terms exclusively, it is hard to believe that Heraclius and some of his followers were unaware of both traditions. However, the Roman aspect of the emperor's triumph probably appealed only to a classically oriented coterie, and was quickly eclipsed, in the popular imagination and even in chronicles, by the image of David.

¹⁶² Giorgio di Pisidia, *Poemi. I. Panegyrici Epici*, ed. with Italian trans. and comm. by A. Pertusi (Rome, 1959). Pertusi considers the poems mainly as sources for the military history of the period. On their significance for the study of imperial ideology, see M. Gigante, "Sulla concezione bizantina dell'imperatore nel VII° secolo," *Synteleia V. Arangio-Ruiz*, I (Naples, 1964), 546–51 (repr. in Gigante, *Scritti sulla civiltà letteraria bizantina* [Naples, 1981], 55–63); Spain Alexander, "Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology, and the David Plates"; Trilling, "Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court"; and I. Shahid, "Heraclius: ΠΙΣΤΟΣ ΕΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ," *DOP* 34–35 (1980–81), 225–37.

is passages from these which bear directly on the study of the Palace mosaic.¹⁶³

In two of these passages the poet establishes the antithesis of reason and passion. Referring to the Minotaur and other mythical half-human creatures, he writes:

As anyone who mixes the bestial perversions of the passions with a rational nature destroys his own form, and thus contaminated belongs to beasthood instead of reason, so a person changed by the evil transformation becomes an ox feeding at the manger, and gorging mindlessly on the fodder of the passions turns beauty to misshapeness.

(*Vanity*, lines 67–74)¹⁶⁴

The vehemence of this formulation makes it clear that it is no mere figure of speech; in George's view if reason is the defining characteristic of humanity, then uncontrolled passion is bestial. To compromise reason with license is to become literally inhuman.

Elsewhere, George relates this principle to specific aspects of the human character, explaining how the devil leads people

... into a bestiality of passions according to their nature. The light-minded he reveals as birds, lechers as pigs, the rapacious as wolves, brawlers as wasps, and the wrathful as panthers. Dissemblers he makes wretched dogs, eager to bite while seeming to fawn, and slanderers he fulfills as sharp-toothed snakes ...

(*Hexaemeron*, lines 775–781)¹⁶⁵

The fact that a poet writing for Heraclius and his court could explicitly equate passions with animals suggests a secondary meaning for the animal imagery of the Palace mosaic: it represents the destructive force of human passions, and the

¹⁶³ Texts of these poems, with Latin translation and commentary by G. M. Querci, appear in vol. 31 of the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1836).

¹⁶⁴ Ὡς πᾶς ὁ μὲν γὰρ τῇ λογιστικῇ φύσει
τὰς κτηνομόρφους τῶν παθῶν παρεμφάσεις,
Ἄνατρεπει τὸ πλάσμα, καὶ πεφυρμένος
Ἐκ τοῦ λόγου μέτεισιν εἰς κτηνωδίαν·
Οὕτως ἀμειφθεὶς τῇ κακῇ παραπλάσει
Ἄνθρωπος εἰς βοῦν φατιῶν παρετράπη·
Καὶ τῶν παθῶν τὸν χόρτον ἐσθίων μάτην
Τὸ κάλλος ἀντέτρεψεν εἰς ἀμορφίαν.
Line 74: Querci reads ἀντέστρεψεν.

¹⁶⁵ Εἰς παρὰ φύσιν τῶν παθῶν κτηνωδίαν.
Καὶ πτηνὰ μὲν δείκνυσιν τὰς κούφας φρένας,
Σῶας δὲ πόρνους, καὶ λύκους τοὺς ὄρπαγας,
Σφήκας δὲ πλῆκτας, θυμικούς δὲ παρδάλεις·
Ποιεῖ δὲ τοὺς εἰρωνᾶς ἀθλίους κύνας,
Σαίνειν δοκοῦντας, καὶ δάκνειν ἡπειγμένους.
Ὅφεις δὲ πικροὺς ἐκτελεῖ τοὺς βασιάνους.

struggle against them.¹⁶⁶ There is no need to insist on a comprehensive symbolic program, with every wild animal the image of an individual vice. Indeed, there is no evidence that such a program was ever intended. The correspondence between *some* of the animals in the mosaic—panther, wolf, boar, snake—and *some* of those mentioned in the passage I have quoted is suggestive, but potentially misleading if we take it too literally. In George's work, the general insistence that passion is bestial far outweighs the more specific comparisons. And while the second of the passages just quoted teaches that each vice reveals an animal nature, the first gives us the converse, that a bestial or monstrous form is the image of ungoverned passion. We may therefore safely assume, and need assume no more than this, that an educated member of the court would have been unable to look at the mosaic without seeing in it the reflection of a spiritual as well as a physical struggle.¹⁶⁷

Further reading of George of Pisidia's work provides an insight into how a contemporary viewer might have understood that struggle:

¹⁶⁶ The equation of animals with destructive passions was something of a cliché in Greco-Roman thought. In the so-called *Tabula* of Cebe, a popular edifying dialogue dating probably from the 1st century, happiness crowns the person who is victorious over "even the mightiest beasts," identified as ignorance, deceit, grief, lamentation, avarice, incontinence, "and every other vice" (J. K. Fitzgerald and L. M. White, eds. and trans., *The Tabula of Cebe* [Chico, Calif., 1983], xxii–xxiii; for other examples of victory over animals as an image of self-mastery, see *ibid.*, note 74). Similar imagery was widely adopted by Christian writers; see Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (East Lansing, 1952), chs. 1–3. For the application of this idea to imperial ideology and imagery, see G. Downey, "The Pilgrim's Progress of the Byzantine Emperor," *Church History* 9 (1940), 207–17; and H. Maguire, "The Art of Describing in Byzantium," *ArtB* 70 (1988), 88–103, esp. 93–94 and note 36.

¹⁶⁷ Once again the Vergilian echo is remarkable, on the level of meaning if not of imagery. In Book III of the *Georgics*, lines 209–83 describe the violent behavior of animals driven by sexual desire. As Putnam explains, "In the first section (209–41), man and animal still remain distinct, though the violence stemming from the animals' inner emotion now frustrates man's attempt at external control. In the second, still more gloomy part (242–283), human and animal natures are as one, man in his humanness yielding to the irrationality of emotion and partaking in animal physicality. For the moment at least, all yearnings for spiritual immortality become subject to the downward, pernicious tuggings of body alone" (*Virgil's Poem of the Earth*, 190). In his discussion of the same passage, Miles likewise emphasizes the susceptibility of human beings to irrational lust (*Virgil's Georgics*, 190–205). Miles is especially interested in the social and political implications of this susceptibility, and argues that for Vergil it is linked to the most destructive currents in human society, those leading to urban corruption and civil war. "In each situation control and self-control are conspicuously absent, and each time the result is that action is both destructive and self-defeating" (*Virgil's Georgics*, 204).

If a man is humble, with downcast glance, then he is borne aloft, and though he lack Perseus' wings, yet even more than Perseus he is the slayer of Gorgons—the ugly sins of error which change those who gaze eagerly upon them into animate stones—and turning to the monster of the passions, with lofty step he slays it, and saves the holy maiden [of] the heart. For if one in search of knowledge should wisely seek to learn his own nature, he knows all nature, and has in truth a universal wisdom; for the nature of man is a little universe.

(*Vanity*, lines 154–166)¹⁶⁸

A quasi-mystical paradox, of a type much favored by the poet, makes humility the key to power: in just such measure as one looks down, one is lifted up.¹⁶⁹ The implication is that humility, perhaps best defined in the context as a lack of self-will, allows the mind to overcome the "monster of the passions." It is clear, however, that this spiritual victory is not regarded as an end in itself. Lines 163–166 establish a direct connection between inner and outer realms of experience. Since the individual self is the image of the world, not only is self-knowledge equated with knowledge of the world, but struggle and victory within the self are the image of struggle and victory in the world at large.

Perseus, a rather surprising choice as the symbol of inner victory through humility, also embodies the progress from internal to external action.¹⁷⁰ Having disposed of the Gorgon and the sea monster—error and passion respectively—he can go on to rescue Andromeda, allegorized as the human heart, or by extension as humanity. Thus while his slaying of monsters stands for the inner triumph over passion, it also stands for the outer

¹⁶⁸ Εἰ δ' αὖ ταπεινός ἐστι, καὶ βλέπει κάτω,
Πρὸς ὕψος ἦρται, καὶ πλέον τοῦ Περσέως,
Κἂν μὴ πτεροῦται, καὶ φονεῦει Γοργόνας,
Τὰς δυσπροσώπους τῆς πλάνης ἀμαρτίας,
Αἱ τοὺς πρὸς αὐτὰς ἐκτενῶς θεωμένους
Λίθους μεταλλάττουσιν ἐμψυχωμένους,
Καὶ πρὸς τὸ κῆτος τῶν παθῶν τετραμμένους,
Τὸ μὲν φονεῦει τῷ μεταρσίῳ δρόμῳ,
Σώζει δὲ σεμνὴν παρθένον τὴν καρδίαν.
Εἰ γὰρ μαθητιῶν τις ἐμφρόνως θέλοι
Μαθεῖν ἑαυτὸν, πάσαν ἔγνω τὴν φύσιν·
Καὶ κοσμικὴν φρόνησιν εἰκότως ἔχει
(Σμικρὸς γὰρ ἐστὶ κόσμος ἀνθρώπου φύσις).
Line 156: Querci reads (incorrectly, I believe) ἀνωπτεροῦται.

Line 160: Querci reads τετραμμένος.

¹⁶⁹ On the importance of such modes of expression in George of Pisidia's work, see Trilling, "Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court."

¹⁷⁰ Perseus' use of a mirror to avoid the danger of Medusa's gaze may be the key to his humility. In effect he acknowledges his limitations, and resists the intoxication of his own heroic role.

duty and power to preserve humanity, and for the foundation of that duty and power in self-knowledge, which confers universal understanding, and in humility, which rejects temptation and allows the mind to be filled with God's purpose. The ideal of an all-knowing, militant beneficence which George presents in these lines captures the quality of *philanthropia*, a central concept of Byzantine political thought which has been shown to feature prominently elsewhere in the poet's work.¹⁷¹ Not only does the figure of Perseus exemplify this quality, but the sequence of his exploits illustrates the stages by which it may be achieved.

The equation of the passions with monsters to be killed reinforces the interpretation which I have suggested for the scenes of animal violence and protection in the Palace mosaic. Far more important, in the mode of thought represented by George of Pisidia, not only is there no distinction between the internal and external struggles, but each necessarily implies the other. We have seen that the object of the outer struggle in the mosaic is nothing less than the safety of civilization, in the general sense of human society and in the specific sense represented by the empire. It follows that the inner struggle has the same object. And where can the inner struggle for the empire take place, but in the soul of the emperor? Thus, the mosaic is not just an emblem of the need to struggle against passion, but a representation of the emperor's soul and its conflicts. The three divisions of the mosaic's subject matter correspond quite literally to divisions within the personality. Animal violence stands, as we have seen, for the destructive force of uncontrolled passion, protection for the internal discipline which keeps that force at bay, and idyllic life for the serenity which comes from self-control.¹⁷²

As an allegory of human nature, the mosaic is uncompromising. Within the individual, as in the

world at large, there is no true peace, only an uneasy balance maintained by eternal vigilance. As an image of the emperor's soul, it is a work of remarkable frankness, an acknowledgment that the potential for evil is present even in the emperor himself. It is precisely the centrality of the emperor's role which necessitates such a radical acknowledgment of his frailty. By assuming absolute power, he assumes absolute responsibility. Identifying himself with the empire, he becomes its soul. Since the individual is a microcosm, the condition of the emperor's soul is inseparable from that of the state. To govern justly he must govern his own soul, and this means acknowledging and overcoming the beasts and monsters of passion within himself. The obligations of imperial *philanthropia* go far deeper than this, however. The dangers depicted in the mosaic are never *just* the passions, they are also, always, the physical dangers which beset the empire, and they are present as such in the emperor's mind. He must therefore not only master himself, but must do battle, in the microcosm of his own person, against the enemies of civilization. He can protect the empire only if he *becomes* the empire, suffers what it suffers, and strives to realize its perfection in himself.

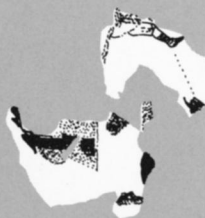
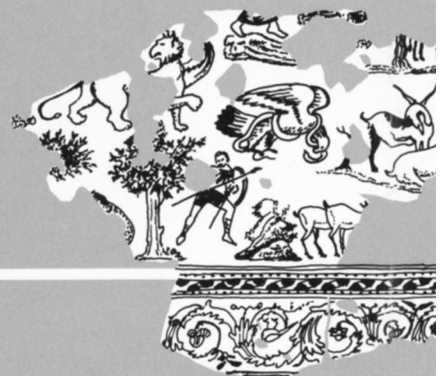
Whoever conceived a work so complex yet ultimately so personal must have known the emperor intimately. Interest thus focuses on the court, and on the figure of the patron as author.¹⁷³ We may never know for sure who this was, but he was one of the most learned and innovative minds of the early Middle Ages. As a scholar, he was deeply versed in Greek and Latin, pagan and Christian

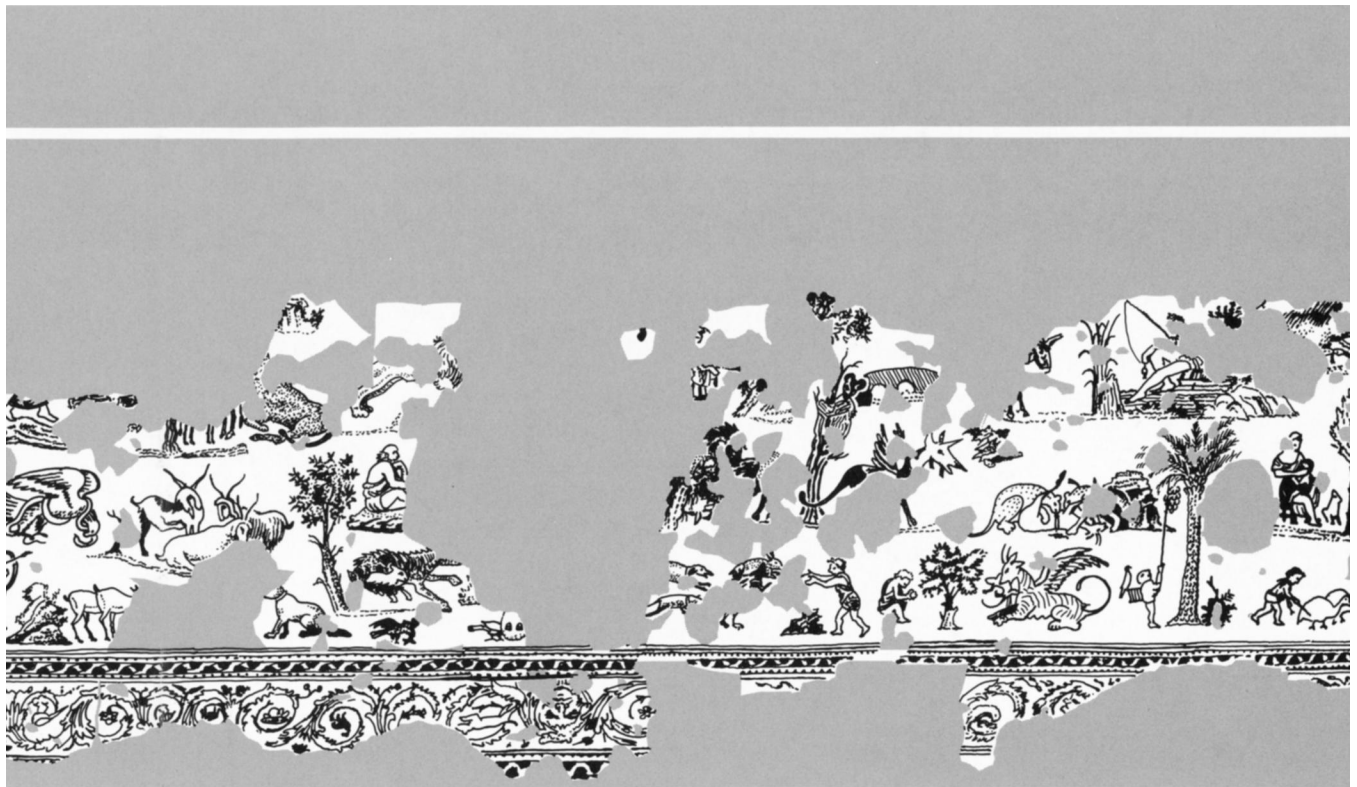
¹⁷¹ Gigante, "Sulla concezione bizantina dell'imperatore nel VII° secolo."

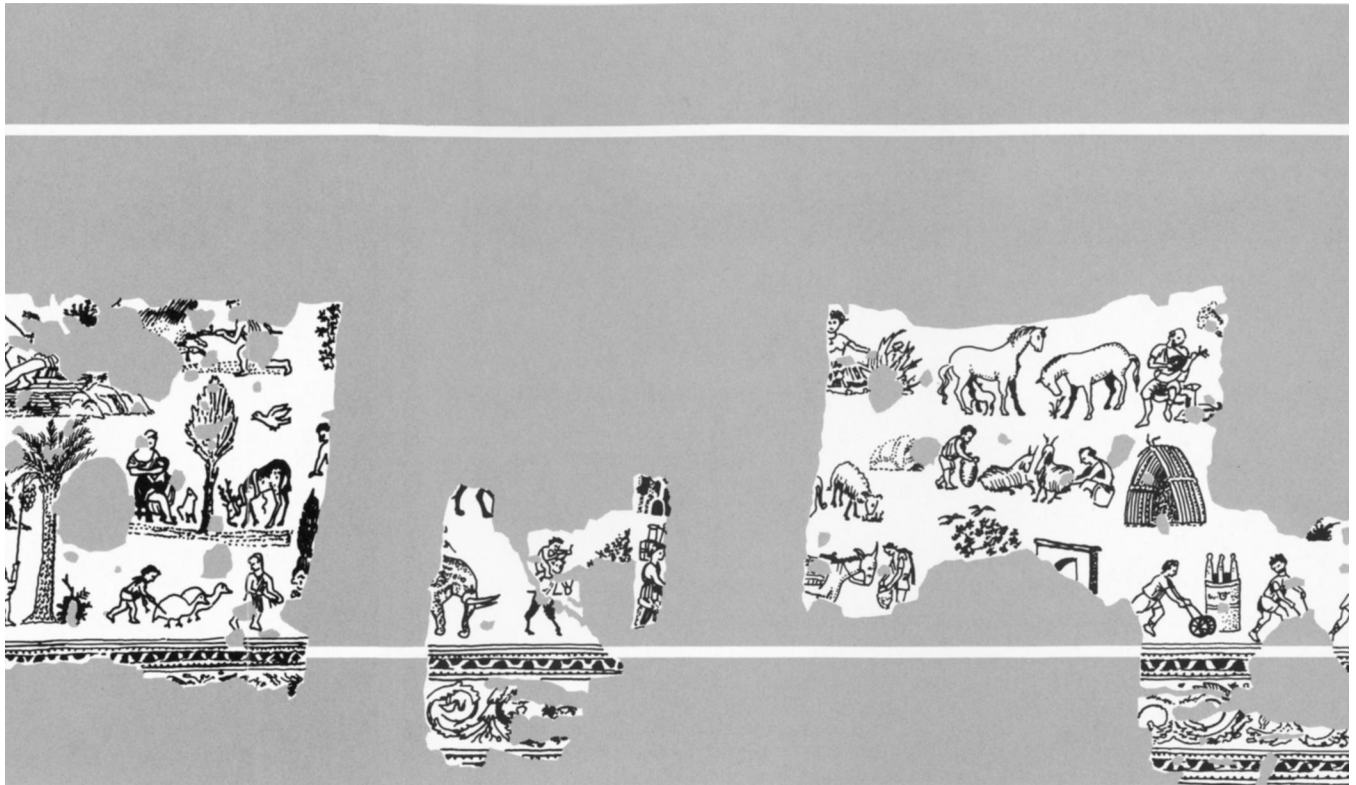
¹⁷² The idea of a tripartite soul goes back to Plato, appearing in somewhat different forms in the *Phaedrus* (246 and 253) and the *Republic* (4.436 ff); on the differences see G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London, 1935), ch. 4. It is interesting that the idea seems from the outset to have invited political interpretations, although these were by no means consistent. Thus Plato himself, in the *Republic*, compares the divisions of the soul to those within the state, while Philo takes up Plato's image of the charioteer, from the *Phaedrus*, and makes it the basis of a warning against rulers who give way to passion ("On Husbandry," xvi-xix). In a Christian context, the late 4th-century writer Ev-

agrius of Pontus briefly and movingly restates the idea of the tripartite soul, with the virtues appropriate to each part (Evagre le Pontique, *Traité pratique ou le moine*, ed. A. and C. Guillaumont [Paris, 1971], no. 89, pp. 680 ff). George of Pisidia makes use of the charioteer image (*Vanity*, lines 252-62). Although the tripartite division of subject matter in the Palace mosaic, in its psychological meaning, must ultimately be derived from such models as these, the relation of its three categories is so distinctive that it would be unwise to assume that the mosaic was intended as the direct expression of a Platonic or other established doctrine of the soul.

¹⁷³ Recent studies of mosaic production indicate a division of physical and intellectual labor among the patron, the designer, and the mosaicist or mosaicists, with emphasis on the creative role of the patron. Although most of the evidence comes from earlier centuries, and from smaller, simpler works than the Palace mosaic, there is no reason to doubt its applicability in the present case. See Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 24-30; C. Robotti, *Mosaico e architettura* (Naples, 1983); Bruneau, "Les mosaïstes antiques avaient-ils des cahiers des mo-

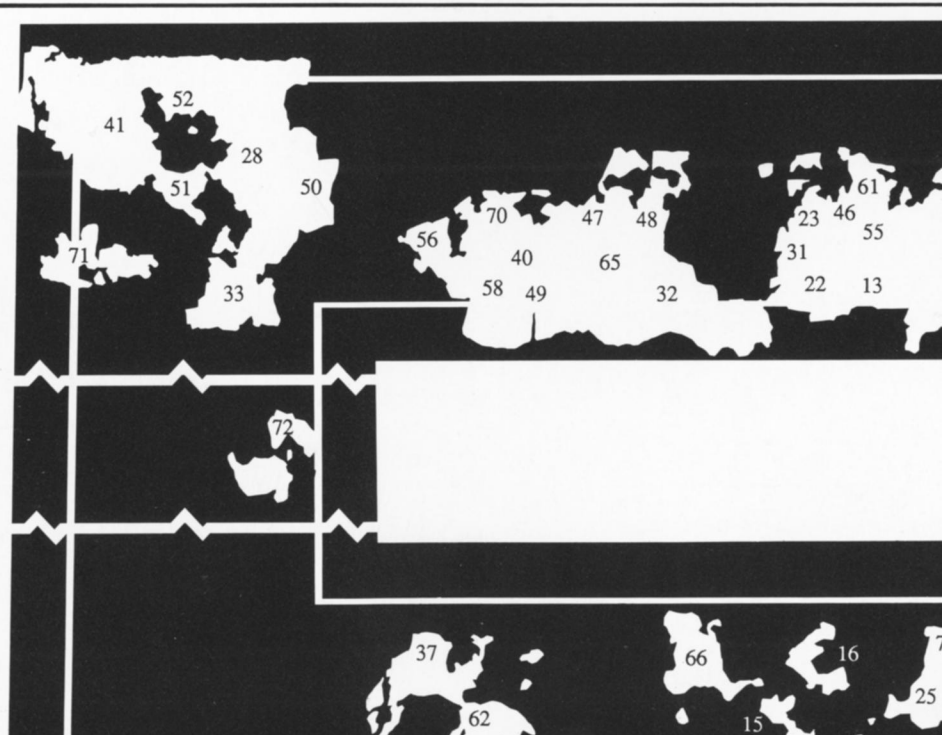
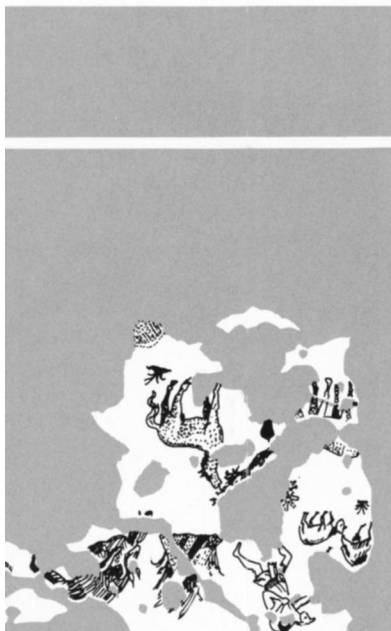


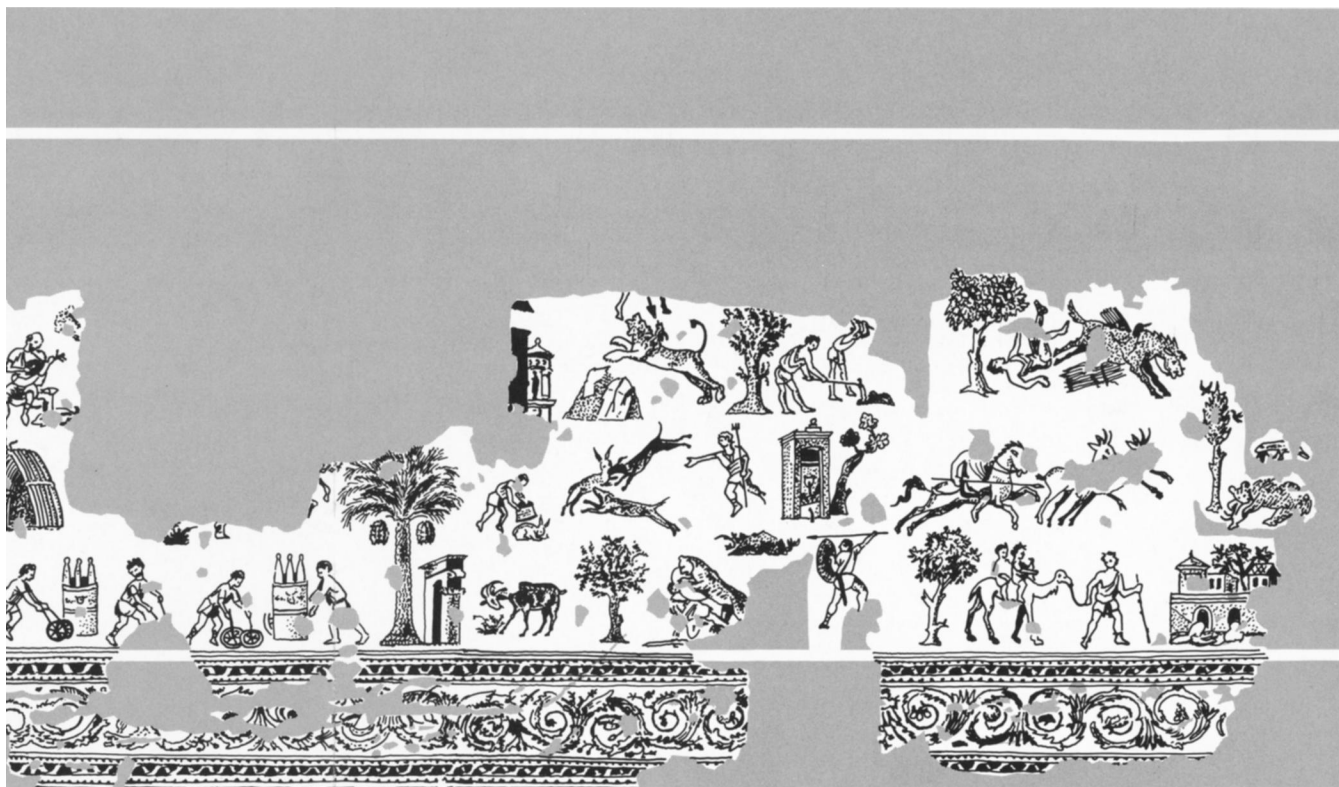




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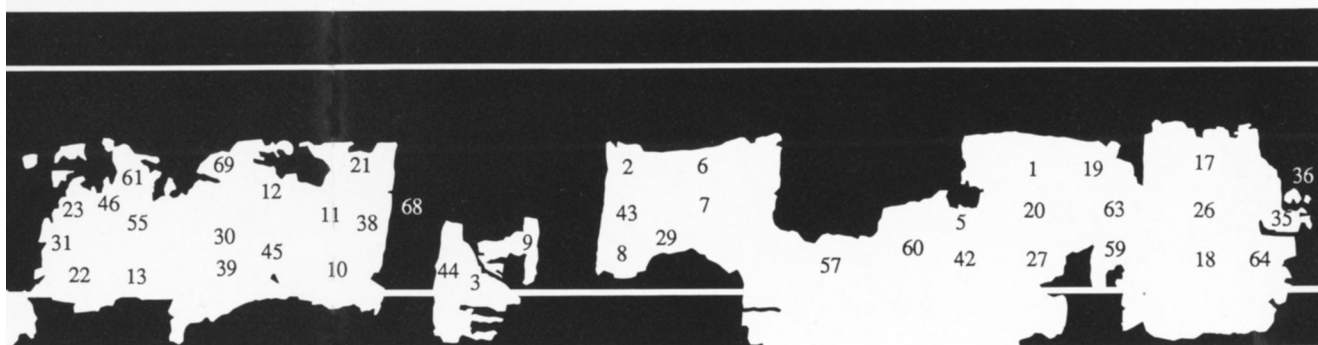
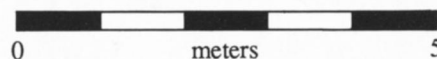
Drawn by Dennis O'Brien From the First and Second



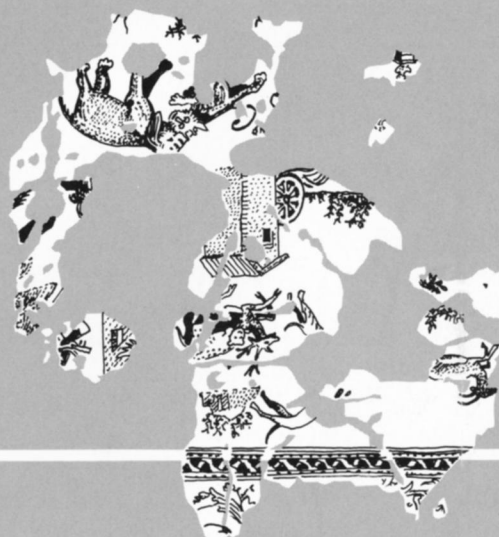
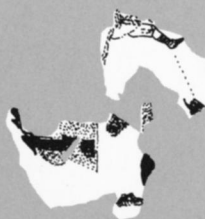
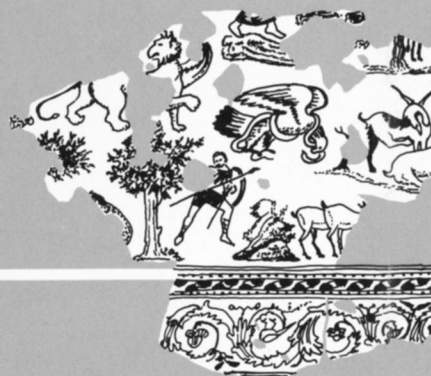
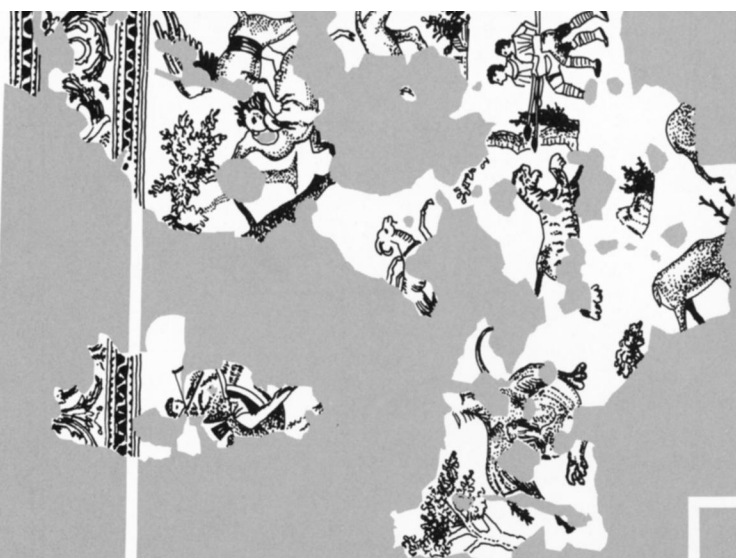


ANTINE IMPERIAL PALACE

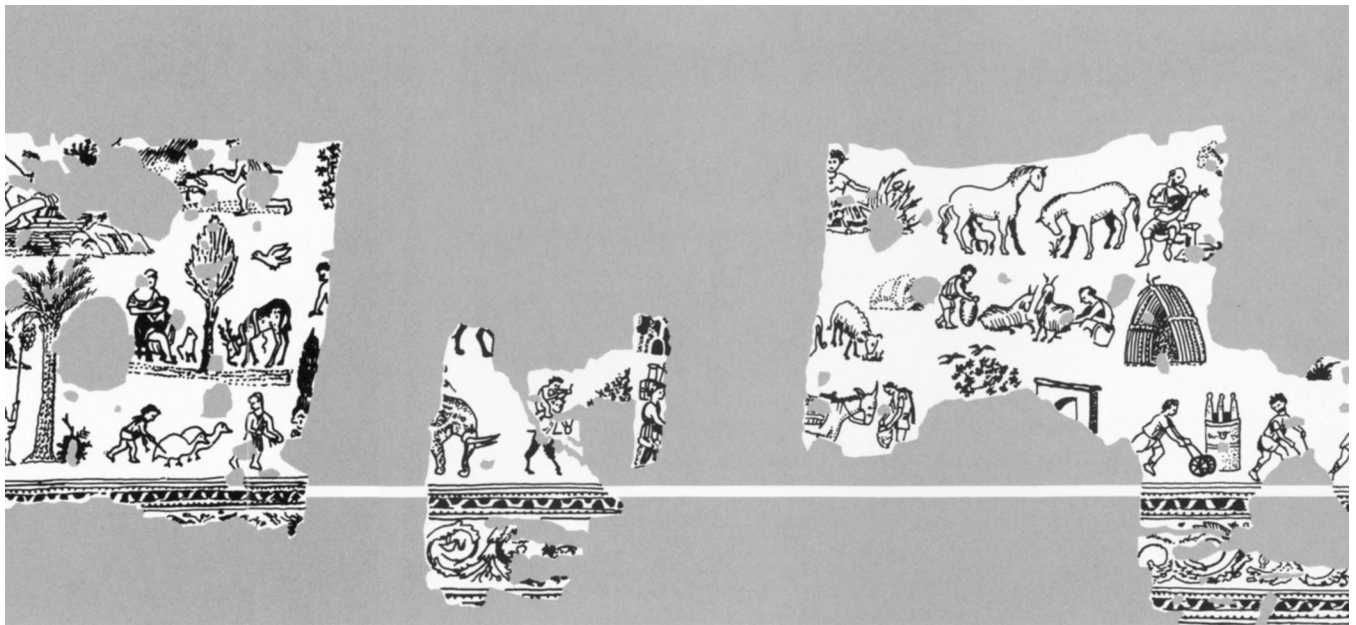
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KEY TO THE IDENTIFICATION OF SCENES IN THE
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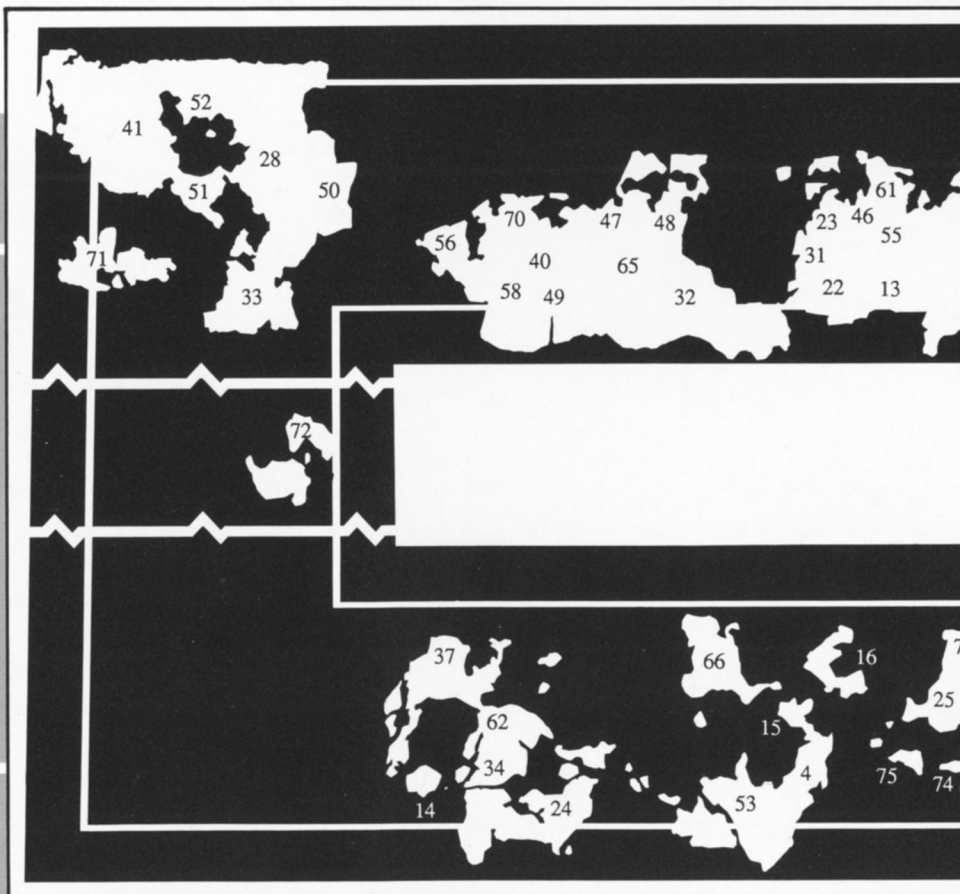


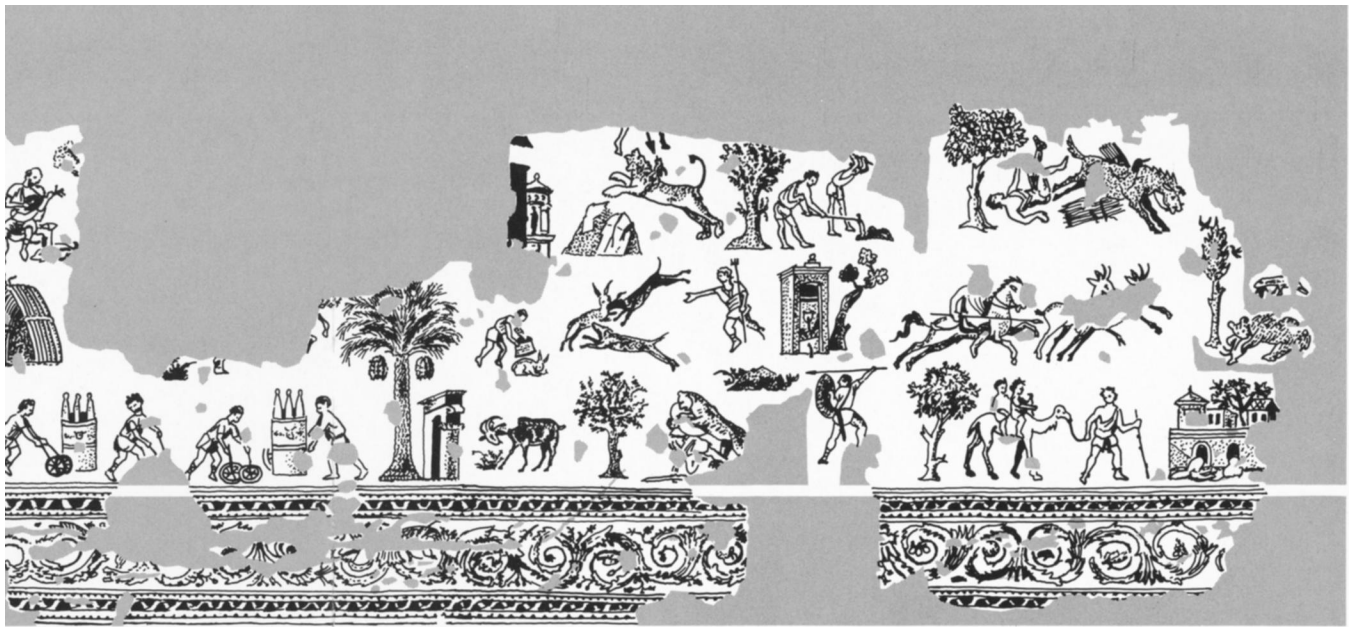




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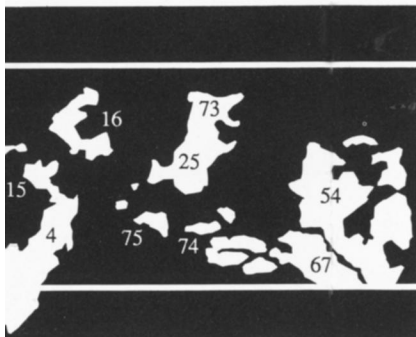
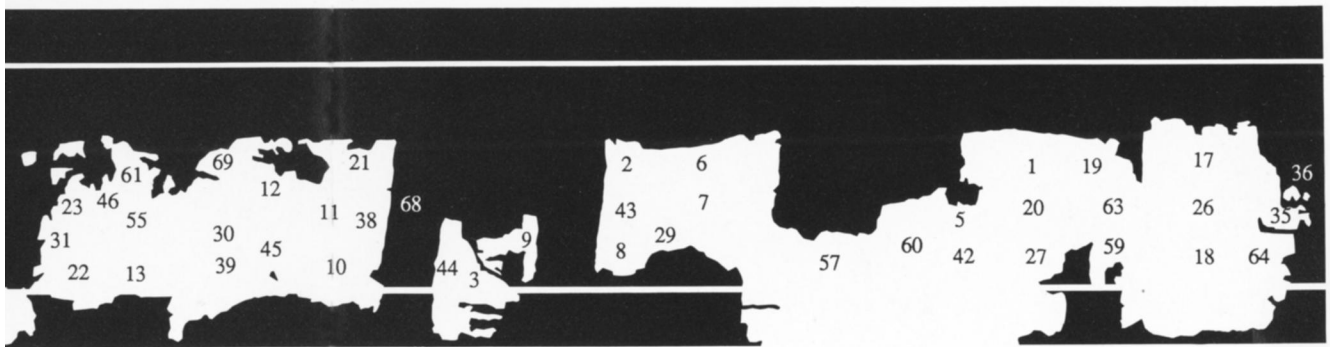
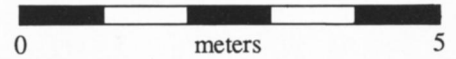
Drawn by Dennis O'Brien From the First and Second





ANTINE IMPERIAL PALACE

First and Second Reports



KEY TO THE IDENTIFICATION OF SCENES IN THE
MAIN FIELD, ACCORDING TO THE NUMBERING
SYSTEM USED IN APPENDIX I.

and courtly literature. It is likely that he lived for a time in North Africa, presumably in the circle of the elder or younger Heraclius. This would best account for the knowledge of Vergil, a mark of unusual if not exceptional learning in seventh-century Constantinople. In art, he appreciated the Greco-Roman tradition in all its variety, and saw no obstacle to using it as a vehicle for contemporary political ideas. Perhaps the most remarkable of his talents, however, was the ability to think in both visual and verbal terms, and to translate one form of expression into the other without such familiar signposts as illustration and personification. Even explicitly symbolic imagery, while not rejected outright, is integrated into a program whose looseness and complexity elicit the greatest possible resonance of *implicit* meaning.

Throughout Byzantine history there were officials of the highest rank who had both the requisite learning and a willingness to involve themselves directly in artistic ventures as sophisticated in their way as the Palace mosaic.¹⁷⁴ Lausus in the fifth century was one, with his collection of antique sculpture arranged to express his own philosophy of art.¹⁷⁵ For our purposes, the most telling example of learning applied to patronage may be the tenth-century Bible of Leo Sacellarius, in the Vatican Library. Its illustrations are framed by epigrams of Leo's own composition, which provide a distinctive interpretation of the biblical scenes, and determine the equally distinctive iconography of the miniatures themselves.¹⁷⁶ In other words, the patron was able to formulate his own interpretation of the entire Bible, articulate it in a series of verses, and collaborate closely enough with the illustrator to insure that in both conception and detail the miniatures would reflect his own many-layered vision.

Such men (and perhaps women)¹⁷⁷ existed at the court of Heraclius: Patriarch Sergius is the best known. Intellectuals attached to the court, such as George of Pisidia or Stephen of Alexandria, could have possessed the necessary qualifications, but probably not the necessary rank and wealth, and it seems unlikely that they stood close enough to the emperor to be allowed such free, if veiled, expression of his hopes and fears.¹⁷⁸ There may of course have been others whose names we do not know, or of whom we know too little to link them with any specific endeavor.

It is also possible that the mosaic was created not just for Heraclius, but *by* him: that he was the author of the program as well as the work's ultimate patron. There is no direct evidence for this, beyond the fact that Heraclius was a man of learning and the reputed author of treatises on astrology and alchemy,¹⁷⁹ but there are precedents in the lives of earlier emperors. If we take the documents at face value, Justinian dealt as a professional equal with his architects in the designing and building of Hagia Sophia.¹⁸⁰ Even if we question the accuracy of Procopius' account, it is hard to imagine such innovation in the central church of the empire without the emperor's close involvement. A very different sort of precedent comes from the more distant past: the so-called *Meditations* of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180). Here, what seem no more than aphorisms take on a personal and tragic force precisely because they were written by an emperor. In particular, his insistence on the vanity of human striving conveys, beyond the search for personal consolation in the face of death, an urgent grasping for the essence of rulership in a dispassionate and disinterested clarity of mind. Just

dèles?"; H. Lavagne, "Les maîtres-mosaïstes de l'Antiquité au XVIIIe siècle: A propos d'un livre récent," *BullMon* 142 (1984), 309–16; Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, 14–15. For an introduction to the problems of patronage in Byzantium, see A. Cutler, "Art in Byzantine Society: Motive Forces of Byzantine Patronage," *JOB* 31/2 (1981), 759–87, and R. Cormack, "Patronage and New Problems of Byzantine Iconography," *Major Papers*, 17th International Byzantine Congress (Washington, D.C., 1986), 609–38.

¹⁷⁴Ihor Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in Paul A. Underwood, ed., *The Kariye Djami*, IV, *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background* (Princeton, 1975), 19–91, esp. 20.

¹⁷⁵See above, p. 38.

¹⁷⁶T. F. Matthews, "The Epigrams of Leo Sacellarios and an

Exegetical Approach to the Miniatures of Vat. Reg. Gr. 1," *OCP* 43 (1977), 94–133.

¹⁷⁷Cf. the earlier example of Anicia Juliana (ca. 463–ca. 527/8), known to us as the patron of the Vienna Dioscorides manuscript and of the church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople (R. M. Harrison, *Excavations at Sarayane in Istanbul*, I [Princeton, 1986]).

¹⁷⁸For these and other intellectual figures associated with Heraclius, see Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, 85–89, and 107 note 91. There is no surviving evidence that any of them had the requisite visual sophistication, including an intense interest in antique art.

¹⁷⁹M. P. E. Berthelot, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs* (Paris, 1888; repr. London, 1963), I, 173–91; Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, I, 358 note v. Even if Heraclius did not actually write the texts, the ascription itself is evidence of his interests and the intellectual esteem in which he was held.

¹⁸⁰Procopius, *Buildings*, I.i.66–78.

so, the Palace mosaic looks beyond the conventional symbolic depiction of the empire, to the personal struggle without which the public image and exercise of power are meaningless. The closer we place the mosaic's imaginative source to the emperor himself, the more personal, and compelling, its underlying vision becomes.

I do not wish to suggest that the mosaic's author, whether or not it was Heraclius, was himself an artist, any more than Lausus or Leo Sacellarius were artists. On the level of patronage and authorship, the Palace mosaic is above all an intellectual achievement. Despite its complexity, it is remarkable for the narrowness of the choices it entailed. The mosaic's final form, visual as well as intellectual, is to a great extent implicit in the project from the beginning; specifically, in the size and shape of the peristyle. No composition that covers the entire area will be legible from any one point or even from any one side. A tightly unified composition, whether narrative or allegorical, would require its viewers to walk around the entire peristyle. But a peristyle is not a focused ritual space like the nave of a church. It lacks an in-built sense of movement and direction, and would actually tend to nullify any such sense in the mosaic. The best hope for clear expression is therefore a composition which does not have to be seen in its entirety to be understood; indeed, one which can be read correctly from a relatively small, random excerpt. Such a composition must have neither a beginning nor an end, nor a single direction in which it must be read. This effectively rules out continuous narrative, or the simpler forms of allegorical imagery, and suggests a type of composition, and a type of symbolic structure, very close to the Palace mosaic as it exists.

The mosaic's creation hinges on three insights by the patron-author. First, not only is the peristyle format compatible with compositional and thematic unity, but it limits, and thus in great measure determines, the form which that unity can take. Second, the mosaic's symbolic structure need not be overt, but can take the form of an amusing collection of self-sufficient images whose deeper meaning is accessible only to those who know how to look for it. Third is the choice of three categories of subject matter whose interaction can express multiple symbolic meanings despite (or perhaps because of) the "random" arrangement imposed by the size and shape of the peristyle, and which can at the same time be appreciated on the level of pure enjoyment without recourse to sym-

bolic readings. These insights are so closely bound up with one another that it is hard to imagine them as the work of separate individuals, or even as distinct stages in an extended process of creation. Together they bring us as close as we are likely to come to the mosaic's intellectual and intuitive genesis.

Although the patron-author's conception of the work was formal as well as thematic, and included the three categories of subject matter, there is no reason to assume that he selected the actual scenes, or was responsible for their precise arrangement. Nothing in the mosaic's thematic structure dictates a register composition as distinct from, say, a grid or interlace composition. The choice and placement of the individual scenes was the responsibility of an artist, the mosaic's designer. It was he who gave a precise visual form to the patron-author's intellectually ambitious but visually incomplete conception.

As we have seen, the Palace mosaic's composition is derived from both Eastern Mediterranean and North African sources, and several details—the inhabited scroll and Oceanus head in the border, the browsing horse, and the reclining semi-nude figure—look back specifically to Roman North Africa. Either type of correspondence (i.e., of composition or of detail) might in itself be dismissed as a vagary of transmission, but together they represent a significant departure from the mainstream of Early Byzantine art and culture, an influence from west to east at a time when the Greek East had long been culturally dominant. The wide-ranging antiquarianism of the patron-author, and his presumed sojourn in North Africa, might explain the similarities among individual images, if he had drawings made of earlier mosaics known or unearthed near Carthage. Compositional principles are another matter, and it is unlikely that anyone but a professional artist had the training and experience to see in arrangements of much earlier date a means of ordering large numbers of images in accordance with new formal and thematic demands. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the designer, like the patron-author, had direct experience of the art of Roman North Africa. We may speculate that their collaboration originated during a time they both spent there.

To return to our reading of the mosaic itself, the perfection which it holds out as both a personal and a political ideal—a Vergilian image of the self-renewing golden age—would seem to be forever out of reach, the prize to be won in a contest that

can never end.¹⁸¹ This is the case if we expect a decisive resolution. To do so, however, would be inconsistent with our reading of the mosaic up to this point. In the macrocosm, wild beasts are a constant threat to idyllic prosperity, calling forth protective figures from within the idyllic world and from outside it. Through their agency, civilization is preserved. There is a crucial distinction here: what survives is not the idyllic society of the golden age, but civilization as it actually exists, fraught with danger and compromise but holding to the awareness of a more nearly perfect state as a source of renewal and an ultimate goal. It is the same in the microcosm. Human nature is fallen nature, and paradise is not to be regained in this life. The soul is beset by the temptation of its own passions, but survives by self-discipline and an awareness of the peace which is the goal of virtue. Both visions are essentially pragmatic: the ideal does not triumph but it endures, its survival as an ideal assured by its indispensability to the individual and to society at large.

There is one sense, however, in which the mosaic may suggest a resolution. George of Pisidia identifies passion not only with a bestial nature but with a *barbarian* nature.¹⁸² In line 1881 of the *Hexaemeron* he addresses Patriarch Sergius, close counselor to the emperor and leader of the defense of Constantinople in 626, as “slayer of barbarian passions.” The spiritual victory with which George credits him is the image of a very real, physical one:

For their [i.e., your people’s] sake bend your neck before God, and all Persia retreats [literally, “bends its feet”]. Turn your legs to the *bema* for their sake, and they thoroughly trample all the barbarians. Bow your back to the ground and the entire world is instantly raised up.

(*Hexaemeron*, lines 1899–1904)¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Putnam comes to a strikingly similar conclusion regarding the *Georgics* themselves: “Control and chaos are locked in a struggle for victory over man and his world that by the end seems never-ending” (*Virgil’s Poem of the Earth*, 15).

¹⁸² The two identifications are anything but mutually exclusive: George combines them in lines 936–40 of the *Hexaemeron*, where he compares the sexual morals of a Persian unfavorably to those of a camel.

¹⁸³ Κάμψον δι’ αὐτοὺς τῷ Θεῷ τὸν αὐχένα,
Καὶ πᾶσα Περσίς ἀντικάμπει τοὺς πόδας,
Κλῖνον δι’ αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ βῆμα τὰ σκέλη,
Καὶ πάντα ἄρδην συμπατοῦσι βαρβάρους.
Τὰ νῶτά σου σύννευσον εἰς τὴν γῆν κάτω,
Καὶ πᾶς ὁ κόσμος εὐθέως ἐγείρεται.

George similarly characterizes the spiritual power of Sergius in one of his epic panegyrics, the *Bellum Avaricum*, lines 130–44. On this passage see Trilling, “Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court,” esp. 257–58. Elsewhere in the same poem

We have already seen in George’s work a metaphorical connection between humility and power or victory. As presented here, however, the practical consequences of the patriarch’s humility and self-mastery belong to the realm of miracle, not metaphor. It is insufficient to say that there is a causal connection between virtue and victory; cause and effect are so intimately, so inevitably connected, that the relation becomes for all practical purposes one of identity. To kill barbarian passions is to kill barbarians.

If the patriarch can bring about physical victory by spiritual means, so too can the emperor. On one level his victory over the passions is a token of his worthiness to rule, and hence to conquer in war. On another level it does not *symbolize* outer victory but rather, as with the patriarch, *mystically implies and enforces it*. To accomplish this, emperor and patriarch must realize, each in his own person, the virtue demanded by their spheres of authority. For Sergius in George’s poem, this virtue is perfect submission to God’s will. For Heraclius, invisible protagonist of the Palace mosaic, it is a willingness to undertake the endless struggle not only with physical danger but with his own nature. The fact that the conflicting elements of the mosaic are in balance, however unstable, means that the struggle is successful. Chaos threatens, but never triumphs. Pragmatically, stalemate is equivalent to victory. It is to confirm this private, uncertain victory that God gives it outward form, rewarding Heraclius with a military triumph envisioned as effortless, instantaneous, and decisive.

APPENDIX 1

Provisional List of Scenes in the Palace Mosaic, with Their Illustration Numbers in the First and Second Reports

(All are from the *First Report* unless otherwise specified.)

Mythological and allegorical (total: 4)

1. Bellerophon and the Chimera (28)
2. Reclining semi-nude figure (30)
3. Satyr carrying child (31)
4. Samson and the lion (43)

(lines 502 ff), George envisions the people of Constantinople joined in Christian harmony, purified of passion and disorder. Their barbarian enemies, drunk with the violence of their own nature, will miraculously be turned against each other in fratricidal rage.

Scenes of daily life (total: 15)

5. Boy putting basket over hare (28); *see also under Hunting*
6. Shepherd with lute and dog and two mares, one with foal (30)
7. Shepherd milking goats, boy with large jar for milk (30)
8. Boy offering feedbag to donkey (30)
9. Woman carrying large jar on her shoulder (31)
10. Boys herding geese (32)
11. Woman nursing baby (32)
12. Fisherman (33)
13. Boy with lamb (33)
14. Seated person with small fish, fragmentary (41)
15. Herdsman with three goats (44)
16. Shaking fruit out of a tree, fragmentary (44)
17. Man kicked by a mule (2.45)
18. Camel ride (2.45)
19. Two peasants hoeing (2.47)

Hunting and animal combat (total: 23)

Hunting scenes (sub-total: 10)

Hunting for food, recreation, or public service (sub-total: 8)

20. Hare hunt with two hounds and trident (28) (= 5) Boy putting basket over hare (28); *see also under Scenes of daily life*
21. Boar hunt (and swampy habitat of the boar?) (32)
22. Hare hunt with four hounds (34)
23. Boar hunt, fragmentary (34)
24. Two hounds pursuing gazelle (42)
25. Soldier and leopard (45)
26. Mounted spearman pursuing two antelope (2.45)

"Hunting" in the arena (sub-total: 2)

27. Swordsman and tiger (28)
28. Two spearmen and tiger (37)

Predation and animal combats (sub-total: 13)

Fights or predation scenes as they might occur in nature (sub-total: 8)

29. Small bird predation (shrike?) (30)
30. Two leopards eating an antelope (33)
31. Lion and prey, fragmentary (34)
32. Hawk and small bird (35)
33. Lion and onager(?) (39)
34. Leopard and deer (41)

35. Bear eating a kid(?) (2.46)

36. Mongoose and prey (2.46)

Fights or predation scenes probably arranged for the arena (sub-total: 1)

37. Elephant and lion (41)

Fanciful or symbolic fights and predation scenes (sub-total: 4)

38. Deer and snake (32)
39. "Griffin" and lizard (33)
40. Eagle and snake (36)
41. Griffin and camel(?) (38)

Animals alone or in non-violent activities (total: 15)

Real animals (sub-total: 13)

42. Grazing wild goat (28)
43. Grazing sheep (30)
44. Elephant with rider, fragmentary (31)
45. Monkey harvesting dates (33)
46. Bear in a tree (fleeing griffin?) (34)
47. Reclining cow with other domestic animals, fragmentary (35)
48. Lion, fragmentary (may be part of violent scene with the preceding) (35)
49. Two antelope (36)
50. Two deer, fragmentary (37)
51. Wild goat(?) (37)
52. Lion (38)
53. Lion with rocky habitat, fragmentary (43)
54. Two horses browsing on a tree (46)

Fantastic animals (sub-total: 2)

55. One-horned "griffin" (33)
56. Eagle-beaked griffin (36)

Miscellaneous scenes (total: 8)

Figural (sub-total: 3)

57. Circus parody with boys racing with hoops (29)
58. Soldier with shield and spear (36)
59. Soldier with shield and spear (2.44)

Non-figural (sub-total: 5)

60. Date palm and portico (29)
61. Arched bridge (34)
62. Water mill (41)
63. Fountain (2.44)
64. Building with water gushing through it (2.46)

Scenes combining too many elements to fit into any one category (total: 3)

- 65. Shepherd with three goats; dog watches them; wolf steals a kid (35)
- 66. Bear attacks person while another bear pulls fruit from tree for cubs (44)
- 67. Shepherd rescues a lamb while wolf eats a sheep (46)

Scenes too fragmentary to be identified with certainty (total: 8)

- 68. Boy (32)
- 69. Donkey (33)
- 70. Female figure crossing a stream (36)
- 71. Mounted archer (39)
- 72. Fragmentary figure (40)
- 73. Lioness(?) (45)
- 74. Figure with hat (45)
- 75. Man with long hair (45)

APPENDIX 2

The Roman Games and the "Aesthetics" of Cruelty

An acceptance of cruelty and violence toward animals, in the form of recreational hunting, has been endemic to large segments of Eurasian society throughout history.¹⁸⁴ Roman civilization is nevertheless unique for the institutionalized cruelty of its games.¹⁸⁵ Gladiatorial contests between humans were not suppressed until the fifth century A.D., and the *venationes* of the arena (literally hunts, actually staged slaughters), while condemned with increasing frequency, were never decisively rejected on moral grounds.¹⁸⁶ The difficulty of incorporating an awareness of large-scale cruelty into our picture of ancient civilization is exemplified by Francis Klingender's *Animals in Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), which seems to aim at comprehensiveness yet manages to sidestep the issue of cruelty almost completely. There is a shudder of admiring revulsion at the Assyrian hunting reliefs, but the pages devoted to the Greco-Roman world dwell almost exclusively on the ways in which the qualities of animals were perceived. The way animals were actually treated gets short shrift;

one would hardly realize the popularity of hunting, let alone of the arena. J. M. C. Toynbee's *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (Ithaca, 1973) provides a far more balanced account. See also J. Aymard, *Essai sur les chasses romaines* (Paris, 1951).

It would be hard to overestimate the pervasive influence of the games on Roman animal imagery.¹⁸⁷ Animal figures which might otherwise assume a more general or symbolic character are depicted in ways that link them explicitly to the arena, for example, wearing the jeweled harnesses with which the fighting animals were often adorned.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps the most striking instance of such imagery is the lavish opus sectile decoration from the Christian building at Ostia.¹⁸⁹ On one level, the popularity of the arena may be explained by its reinforcement of a profound complacency on the part of the spectators. The imagery of kings and heroes killing monsters or wild animals, so prevalent throughout the ancient world, is symbolic not merely of power but of the triumph of civilization over the forces of nature, and this symbolism is implicitly perpetuated in the spectacle of exotic animals from the farthest reaches of the world brought together by the resources of a centralized empire for the amusement of its people. There is, too, the implication that animals exist for the benefit of mankind, and that human beings have not only a right but even an obligation to assert their "humanity," that is, their superiority, by killing them. Zoya Pavlovskis' fascinating study *Man in an Artificial Landscape* (Leiden, 1973) brings out the complacency of the Roman attitude, the "mixture of sentimentality and cruelty," in a poem by Statius (*Silvae* 2.5) describing a lion "dutifully" dying in the arena. Her account makes explicit the callousness and complacency implicit in the casual decorative use of arena motifs in Roman art.

Needless to say, the arena was compelling on another level as well, one far more elemental, less responsive to even the most basic cultural symbolism. Its obsessive fascination is vividly conveyed by St. Augustine's account of his friend Alypius, a former enthusiast who had come to reject the games. Dragged to the arena against his will by a group of friends, Alypius resolves to keep his eyes shut

¹⁸⁴ For examples from Roman mosaic decoration, see Lavin, "The Hunting Mosaics of Antioch," and Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*.

¹⁸⁵ For a brief, meticulous, and frightening survey of this phenomenon, see K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge, 1983), 1–30.

¹⁸⁶ G. Lafaye, "La *venatio* dans les jeux de l'amphithéâtre," in Daremberg and Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines* (Paris, 1877–1919), 5.2, pp. 700–709.

¹⁸⁷ This influence is discussed by C. Kondoleon in *Realities and Representations: The Mosaics of the House of Dionysos at Paphos*, ch. 6 (forthcoming).

¹⁸⁸ H. P. L'Orange, "The Apotropaic Lion Head and the Arena Lion on Third Century Sarcophagi," *Studia Romana in Honorem Petri Krarup Septuagenarii* (Odense, 1976), 132–37.

¹⁸⁹ G. Becatti, *Edificio con opus sectile fuori Porta Marina. Scavi di Ostia*, VI (Rome, 1969), pl. 59.

throughout the spectacle. However, the noise of the crowd at a particularly exciting moment tempts him to look, "confident that he would find it repulsive and remain master of himself." Instead, spellbound by what he sees, he "revelled in the wickedness of the fighting and was drunk with the fascination of bloodshed," becoming as obsessed a follower of the games as he had ever been.¹⁹⁰ The combats here are between humans, but it is unlikely that fights between animals, or between animals and men, were very different in their sensational effect.

To say that "the fascination of bloodshed" alone accounts for the games' hold on the popular imagination is to be misled, at least in part, by the assumption that bloodshed was, or was intended to be, an end in itself. Perhaps the best insight into the emotional basis of such spectacles is to be derived not from investigation of their place in the Roman world, but from a modern work, Ernest Hemingway's account of the art and cult of bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932). The enthusiasm with which Hemingway, in a twentieth-century context, conveys the courage and subtlety of the matador and enters, however fancifully, into the motives and responses of the bull (are we so very far from Statius' lion?), bridges the gap of time and allows us to see the enjoyment of the Roman arena as something at least possible in human terms, in the degree to which, as in the bullfight, technique and the rhythm of the spectacle eclipse its intrinsic cruelty.

This is of course an over-simplification, with regard both to bullfighting and to the Roman games.

¹⁹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, bk. VI, chs. 8–9, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore, 1961).

Again and again, Hemingway returns to the idea of the bullfight or the bullfighter "giving emotion." In one sense, this is no more than is expected from any sports event, spectacle, or work of art. But when applied to an event comprising mortal danger (to the human participant) and certain death (to the animal) it implies something more specific and potentially far less benign: a vicarious confrontation with ultimate things. The difference between a bullfight and, say, a stage tragedy is that although both are, for the spectator, vicarious encounters with death, in the bullfight the death is real. In either case the audience may become jaded, but whereas in art this circumstance challenges the artist to innovate, a public jaded with real death as a giver of emotion may demand *more death* to give *more emotion*. This is what happened to the Roman games, beginning as early as the Republican period, with public figures providing larger and larger numbers of animals to be killed.¹⁹¹ I do not mean to imply that recreational violence and cruelty are acceptable when they are a means to an end, and abominable only when they become an end in themselves. I would suggest, however, that the Roman games may have appealed, at least in part, to impulses more complex, and less debased, than those which are gratified by bloodshed alone. And while the uneasiness of our own society in confronting the excesses of the Roman games is a measure of the extent to which we have succeeded in banishing some of our more overtly violent impulses, the vividness with which they may be evoked through the medium of bullfighting suggests that the banishment is by no means complete.

¹⁹¹ Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, 17–23.